GOVERNMENT IN COURT OVER REMOVING EU ANIMAL WELFARE LAW THAT PROTECTS CHICKENS

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The Animal Law Foundation will be facing the Government in Court next week challenging the removal of welfare protections for chickens.

London, UK: On 3-4 February 2026 The Animal Law Foundation will be in the Royal Courts of Justice challenging the government over amending an EU derived welfare protection that prohibited the handling of chickens by their legs, a practice which causes immense suffering. This represented the first dilution of welfare standards since Brexit.

Under the European Transport Regulation 1/2005, which until recently applied in the UK, it was strictly forbidden to lift chickens by their legs during transport and related operations:

“It shall be prohibited to… lift or drag the animals by head, ears, horns, legs, tail or fleece, or handle them in such a way as to cause them unnecessary pain or suffering.”

Handling chickens by the legs causes significant pain and distress, and injuries like fractures and dislocations. When chickens are inverted they can suffocate, as their internal organs begin to crush their lungs, which are not protected by a diaphragm. It is standard practice on UK farms due to commercial reasons to maximise efficiency and profit when collecting chickens for slaughter.

However, despite the law and the harm towards chickens, the Government permitted this practice in its Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets and the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens.

The Animal Law Foundation challenged the unlawful codes; however, in response to the case, rather than enforce the law or update the codes, the government changed the law instead to remove the legal protection. It did this via a Statutory Instrument, which came into force on 22 July 2025.

In its legal challenge, The Animal Law Foundation will argue that the consultation exercise, which paved the way for the change in law, was unfair.

The High Court agrees that The Animal Law Foundation has an arguable case.

Morgane Alting von Geusau, Advocacy and Communications Coordinator, The Animal Law Foundation said:

“Consultations must be fair. Whilst a public authority can have a ‘preferred’ outcome, it must not have a predetermined outcome or have a closed mind. Here the government had made it clear beforehand that its plan was to change the law to allow for the handling of chickens by the legs.

The outcome of this hearing will affect the lives of billions of chickens in the UK and determine the difference between treating animals with compassion or treating them merely as commodities to maximise profit. ”

The Animal Law Foundation is represented by Philip Rule KC.

Chicken handling was exposed in an investigation by Animal Justice Project, with catchers seemingly grabbing as many as 5 distressed chickens in each hand.

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