'Sneaky' law change could criminalise peaceful protest against animal testing

Friday 9 January, 2026

Naturewatch Foundation is urging Members of Parliament to vote against a controversial Statutory Instrument (SI) next week (14 January 2026) warning it represents a quiet but dangerous attack on democratic protest and transparency around animal testing.

Under the Public Order Act 2023, protests can already be restricted around "Key National Infrastructure" — such as roads, rail, oil and gas facilities — if they significantly disrupt services that keep the country running. Campaigners say those protections, while controversial, are at least understandable.

Animal testing, they argue, is different.

On 27 November 2025, ministers laid an Affirmative Statutory Instrument to reclassify "Life Sciences infrastructure" as Key National Infrastructure. The proposal, due to be voted on in Parliament 14 January 2026, would effectively shield any site linked to animal testing (including breeding facilities, laboratories, universities and medical research centres) from protest.

Campaigners describe the move as "sneaky", saying it dramatically expands police powers using secondary legislation, with little scrutiny and no meaningful public consultation. *"Animals used in science are not 'Key National Infrastructure,"* said Kate Salmon, Campaign Manager at Naturewatch Foundation. *"The inclusion of this in an amendment to the Public Order Act 2023 is a direct attack on the public's right to have a voice."*

The wording of the amendment is broad and vague, raising fears that even low-level, peaceful actions could carry severe penalties. Any protest activity, regardless of the topic, deemed to cause "significant delay" or "interference" could result in up to 12 months' imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

Campaigners warn this could include:

? Students protesting their university's poor accommodation options

? Peaceful sit-ins opposing dog breeding facilities supplying laboratories

? Campaigners lobbying suppliers to withdraw support from animal testing companies

The protest topic is irrelevant under the proposals; it is the facilities themselves that are being shielded.

Public access to information about animal experimentation is already severely limited under Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Campaigners argue that further restricting the public's ability to question or protest animal testing is incompatible with democratic values.

The campaign is being delivered in collaboration with Camp Beagle, whose long-running peaceful protests against animal testing facilities have played a vital role in exposing the realities of animal experimentation. The timing of the SI has also raised serious questions. In November 2025, the Government published its long-awaited Strategy to Phase Out Animal Testing, a move widely welcomed by animal welfare organisations and the public alike. Redefining animal testing facilities as 'protected infrastructure' risks contradicting the transparent journey to phase out, which was so promising following the strategy's release.

Kate Salmon, Campaign Manager at Naturewatch Foundation, said:

"We have raised serious concerns about the implications of this amendment, including the potential to criminalise peaceful protesters for exercising their right to speak out on topics they believe in. This is far more extensive than animal welfare, and it isn't about being against animal testing; it's about believing in democracy. I'd like to thank campaigners, MPs, and the public who have stood alongside us in ensuring the Government doesn't silently glide this through, as they initially intended to. "

Public concern has been amplified through a collaborative social media post by Naturewatch Foundation, Camp Beagle and high-profile supporters, including Gemma Collins, Faye Winter, Amanda Abbington and Meg Mathews, with a combined following of over 9 million people.

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The Statutory Instrument has already triggered resistance in Parliament. It failed to pass quietly through delegated committee, and MPs reportedly shouted “No” when ministers attempted to wave it through the Commons without debate.

Naturewatch Foundation is urging MPs to vote against the amendment and is calling on members of the public to email their MPs immediately, warning that the fast-tracked process leaves little time for intervention. *“You don't have to be against animal testing; you just have to believe in democracy”* Kate added.

To email your MP, please follow this link:
https://action.naturewatch.org/thrown-prison-being-voice-animals-not-our-watch

ENDS

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About Naturewatch Foundation: Naturewatch Foundation is a UK-based animal welfare charity dedicated to ending cruelty and improving the lives of animals through campaigning, education and advocacy. For over 30 years, the charity has led initiatives to tackle illegal and unethical practices, including puppy farming, animal experiments and wildlife crime. By working with policymakers, enforcement agencies and the public, Naturewatch Foundation strives to make the world a kinder place for animals. Visit naturewatch.org to find out more.

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