

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01708](#)

Main Petitioner: Mark Banahan, on behalf of The Vegan Society & Go Vegan Scotland

Subject: Catering for vegans on all public sector menus

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to bring forward legislation to guarantee plant-based options on every public sector menu every day, to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals.

Background

Veganism is the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products, particularly in diet, and an associated philosophy that rejects the commodity status of animals.

Vegans eat a plant-based diet that excludes meat, eggs, dairy or other animal products. Many vegans extend this approach into other areas of their lives and reject the 'commodification' of animals altogether, avoiding the use of any animal-derived or tested products (including certain clothing, cosmetics and medicines).

The Vegan Society itself [defines veganism as](#):

“a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”

NHS Inform [advises that](#) a vegan diet can be suitable for anyone, as long as it is balanced and takes account of the particular requirements associated with certain life stages, such as [early childhood](#) or [during pregnancy](#).

The Vegan Society [estimates that](#) there are currently around 600,000 vegans in Great Britain, or 1.16% of the population.

Veganism, Human rights and equality legislation

The [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR) protects the human rights of people in countries that belong to the Council of Europe. The Convention guarantees specific rights and freedoms including, under Article 9, the right to freedom of thought, belief and religion. The [Human Rights Act 1998](#) incorporates all of the rights set out in ECHR into UK law. It also requires all public bodies to respect and protect those rights. The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission has [made it clear](#) that the right to freedom of belief protects a wide range of non-religious beliefs, including veganism.

Similarly, the [Equality Act 2010](#) makes it illegal to discriminate against someone because of their beliefs, regardless of whether those beliefs are religious or philosophical in nature. This would include veganism. The Act places a duty on public bodies (and other organisations carrying out public duties, such as contractors) to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- foster good relations between different groups

Veganism and climate change

The Vegan Society argues that, by reducing our consumption of meat and adopting a plant based diet, we can have a significant impact on efforts to limit climate change. On 8 October 2018, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) published its extensive [Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C](#). In the report, the authors state that:

“There is increasing agreement that overall emissions from food systems could be reduced by targeting the demand for meat and other livestock products, particularly where consumption is higher than suggested by human health guidelines. Adjusting diets to meet nutritional targets could bring large co-benefits, through GHG [Greenhouse Gas] mitigation and improvements in the overall efficiency of food systems.”

Scottish Government Action

On 2 July 2018, the Scottish Government published [A healthier future: Scotland's diet and healthy weight delivery plan](#). This sets out how Ministers plan to help people in Scotland make healthier choices. It recognises the key role that procurement for public sector menus could play in helping to increase

the availability of healthy food options and commits the Scottish Government to producing relevant guidance by 2020.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not considered the specific issue of catering for vegans on all public sector menus.

The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) employs a catering services provider to manage and operate all catering facilities and outlets within the Scottish Parliament campus. The provider is expected to maintain the Healthy Living Award and the Healthy Living Award Plus in the Parliament's catering facilities. This includes offering vegetarian/vegan options and meeting reasonable allergenic, ethnic and religious diets.

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