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for Environment,  
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Sir Roger Gale MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

9 July 2025

Dear Roger,

Thank you for your question in the House during Business Questions on Thursday 12th June about permitted methods for handling chickens. I am responding as Defra's Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs, with responsibility for farm animal welfare.

All farm animals are protected by comprehensive and robust animal health and welfare legislation and this Government is committed to upholding the highest animal welfare standards.

An 8-week joint GB-wide consultation seeking views on proposals to provide clarity on the permitted methods for manually catching laying hens, meat chickens and turkeys closed on 2 May. A Summary of Responses and Government Response was published on 30 June :[Poultry catching and handling: proposed changes to permitted methods](#).

We have amended assimilated Regulation (EC) No.1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations in England, Wales and Scotland to:

- allow laying hens, meat chickens, and turkeys (weighing 5kg or less), to be caught by two legs,
- not permit turkeys (weighing more than 5kg) to be inverted during catching or handling, whether held by the legs or not.

The legislation previously prohibited any animal from being lifted by the legs whilst, for more than 20 years, the statutory guidance has indicated that catching chickens by both legs can be acceptable.

These amendments will **not lower animal welfare standards** in practice as the GB poultry industries currently catch chickens by the legs, and not upright by the body. By permitting two-leg catching we have simply resolved a discrepancy and brought the legislation in-line with GB statutory guidance.

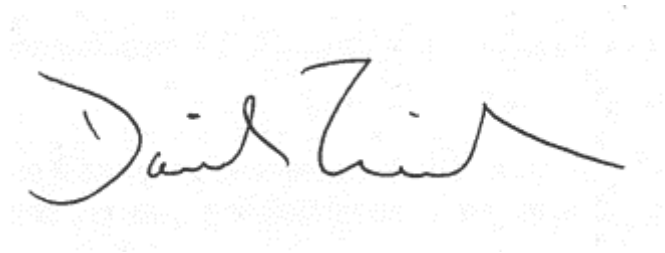
By prohibiting one-leg catching we are minimising welfare harm and providing absolute clarity that this is not a legally permitted method.

We recognise that there is evidence to suggest that upright catching by the body is the optimum handling method to directly minimise welfare harms. However, the consultation responses confirmed our initial assessment, that we cannot be confident that the British egg and meat chicken industries would be able to make a comprehensive transition to upright catching in a manner that would deliver an overall improvement in bird welfare, at this time. Defra has recently commissioned a targeted research project to study the impact of various catching methods (including two-leg and upright) on logistics and

cumulative welfare outcomes. The information generated will be crucial to inform future policy on catching methods.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the library of the House.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Zeichner', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**DANIEL ZEICHNER MP**