

# Judgment given in the case of The Humane League UK v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, December 13, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today sees the judgment released in The Humane League UK v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (CA-2023-001312: <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewca/civ/2024/1560>).

Rupert Earle and Chandni Luhar-Torres of Bates Wells, and Nick Armstrong KC of Matrix Chambers acted for the RSPCA, who supported The Humane League UK (THL) in this case.

The case, originally heard in the High Court in May 2023 and the Court of Appeal in October 2024, challenged whether Defra's policy (or failure to have one) that permits the use of fast-growing breeds of chicken, often referred to as broilers, is unlawful and breaches welfare regulations.

The judgment handed down today rejected THL's appeal seeking a declaration regarding the correct interpretation of Paragraph 29 of [Schedule 1 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals \(England\) Regulations 2007](#), as well as challenges to Defra's Code of Practice and its trigger system, which is intended to identify poor welfare conditions in conventionally reared meat chicken holdings.

However, in the core of the judgment the Court of Appeal (with all three judges giving judgments) did set out its view on the correct interpretation of paragraph 29, in order to correct the High Court's erroneous interpretation. This judgment means that it may now be difficult for UK farmers lawfully to keep fast growing broiler chickens.

'Fast growing chickens', as a result of genetic selection, reach their slaughter weight in 5-6 weeks, in comparison to slow-growing breeds that reach their slaughter weight in 7-8 weeks. In the UK more than one billion meat chickens are slaughtered every year, and of that only a small percentage are slow growing breeds.

Research in the 2020 RSPCA report, ['Eat. Sit. Suffer. Repeat. The Life of a Typical Meat Chicken'](#), revealed that the selection of meat chickens for performance contributed to severe welfare problems in broilers, research which has been supported in other studies, including [as identified by the European Food Safety Authority](#).

Rupert Earle, comments: "Defra, and all those involved in UK chicken farming (including the

integrators which supply the majority of meat chickens) will need to consider carefully whether fast growing chicken breeds can now lawfully be farmed, save in the event that suffering resulting from their genetic selection is no more than minimal or momentary, or can be made so as a result of keeping conditions (both of which seem problematic, based on current evidence). The Court made clear that commercial productivity considerations are no defence. The implications of the Court's views on the interpretation of paragraph 29 extend well beyond broiler chickens, given the extent of selective breeding in farming. The case illustrates the value of judicial review in challenging government inertia, even where a decision to challenge is elusive, and of persistence on the part of THL and the RSPCA".

Emma Slawinski, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns at the RSPCA, said: "This is a significant and vital step in improving the lives of meat chickens who currently live short, brutal lives, who can often struggle to stand, suffer from heart defects, and even sudden death, and should lead to a seismic change for billions of meat chickens."

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