



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Dog Meat Trade

By Elena Ares  
Madeline Burke

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## Summary

In many parts of Asia – particularly in countries such as China, the Philippines, Vietnam and South Korea – it is culturally acceptable to eat dog meat. These are not the only countries that eat dog meat around the world, dog meat is also eaten in Switzerland, Mexico and the Arctic and Antarctic, however most western cultures consider the practice “taboo”. In many Asian countries dogs have only relatively recently been kept as pets and so the animals are viewed very differently to the way they are viewed in the west<sup>1</sup>. However, several animal charities draw attention to the condition in which the dogs are often kept prior to being killed for human consumption. Some animal welfare charities argue that dogs are often tortured before being killed because of a belief that it causes their meat to be tender. There are also concerns that most of the ‘meat dogs’ are in fact stolen companion dogs and strays who are kept in terrible conditions while being transported from country to country.

A particular concern for many charities is Yulin Dog Meat Festival which is held in [Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China](#), every year. News articles estimate 10,000 dogs are killed at the festival, having been inhumanely transported from other countries in tiny cages, often without food or water, before being beaten to death. There is a huge social media campaign to stop this festival, though its effectiveness has been questioned.

Although it is illegal to commercially slaughter and sell dog meat in many countries around the world, law enforcement is weak and it continues being a popular dish even where it is prohibited<sup>2</sup>. There are no international laws prohibiting the consumption of dog meat. The UK Government is not therefore able to intervene or take trade measures against countries where the consumption of dog meat is regarded as culturally acceptable. UK ambassadors and Foreign Office officials have, however, raised the issue with the governments of China, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam in the past. On Thursday 5th November 2015 MPs will take part in a debate on the dog meat trade. [This debate, which was scheduled by the Backbench Business Committee](#) following [a bid from Robert Ffello MP](#), aims to “*put pressure on the countries that are involved in this appalling and barbaric trade to do something about it, and ideally to end it permanently*”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Newsbeat, [Why the UK doesn't eat dog meat, but people in China do](#), June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015

<sup>2</sup> Voiceless Friends, [Dog Meat Trade](#), accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons, Backbench business, uncorrected transcript, [Representations taken before the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday 20th October 2015](#)

# 1. Background

Eleven countries around the world eat dog meat. Many of these, including China, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines, are in Asia. However there are other countries around the world that eat dog meat such as Switzerland, dogs are regularly eaten by farmers in rural areas, despite the commercial slaughter and sale of dog meat being illegal<sup>4</sup>. Dogs are also eaten in Mexico<sup>5</sup>, the Arctic and Antarctic<sup>6</sup>.

In Vietnam it is estimated that 5 million dogs are eaten every year. According to the September 2013 Guardian article, [How eating dog became big business in Vietnam](#), dog is the go-to dish for drinking parties, family reunions and special occasions in Vietnam<sup>7</sup>:

It is said to increase a man's virility, warm the blood on cold winter nights and help provide medicinal cures, and is considered a widely available, protein-rich, healthy alternative to the pork, chicken and beef that the Vietnamese consume every day.

In China, dog meat is a prized as a nutritious dish. Doctors also sometimes prescribe dog meat to treat maladies such as impotence and poor circulation. Offering dog meat to patients is also a South Korean tradition<sup>8</sup>. The US ambassador Mark Lippert was reportedly [offered dog](#) meat by a man following the recent knife attack he suffered.

However, an article on [China.org.cn](#) which discusses this issue of dog meat, points out that unlike in Western countries, in China dogs have only recently become pets.

Dogs, like cows, were for working and eating, so for many Chinese, there is nothing wrong with eating dog, which was first recorded in the Spring and Autumn Period (around 722 to 481 BC)<sup>9</sup>.

The article also points out that as more people in China are keeping dogs as pets more are becoming opposed to the idea of eating them.

It might be difficult to draw a universally accepted line as to what animals should be eaten. But when there is already a vast variety of meat, maybe it is time to stop serving dog.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> BBC Newsbeat, [Stop eating cats and dogs say animal rights campaigners in Switzerland](#), November 26<sup>th</sup> 2014

<sup>5</sup> Say no to dog meat.net, [Mexico: Dog meat trade](#), December 25<sup>th</sup> 2014

<sup>6</sup> Fox News, [Countries that eat dog](#), September 5<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, [How eating dog became big business in Vietnam](#), September 27<sup>th</sup> 2013

<sup>8</sup> Change for Animals Foundation, [Dog meat and human health: Dispelling the health benefit myths](#), accessed October 30<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>9</sup> China.org.cn [China Voice: One man's dog meat is another's poison](#), June 18<sup>th</sup> 2014

## 2. Dog Meat Trade in Asia

Although it is illegal to commercially slaughter and sell dog meat in many countries around the world, law enforcement is weak and it continues being a popular dish even where it is prohibited<sup>10</sup>. There are no international laws prohibiting the consumption of dog meat. The UK Government is not therefore able to intervene or take trade measures against countries where the consumption of dog meat is regarded as culturally acceptable.

Countries such as the Philippines (in the 1980s) or Taiwan (in 2001) have imposed animal welfare acts to ban the trading and eating of dog meat, but animal rights campaigners have accused the governments of not prosecuting those who continue to slaughter and serve dog meat as of 2011<sup>11</sup>.

Although China does not currently have in place legislation to protect animals, in 2010 a draft animal welfare legislation was proposed to prohibit the consumption of dog meat. Chinese animal protection groups however have predicted that this legislation will not be effective at curbing the trade<sup>12</sup>. Some areas of China however, such as Hong Kong, have effectively introduced bans on dog meat consumption<sup>13</sup>.

In South Korea, 2 million dogs are killed each year for their meat, and although the [Korea Food & Drug Administration](#) recognises all edible products as 'food', other than drugs, Seoul has passed a regulation classifying dog meat as a 'repugnant food'. Once again, however, the regulation has so far been ineffective at stopping the demand for dog meat.

### 2.1 Yulin Dog Meat Festival

In China, in particular, there is an annual dog meat festival in Yulin ([Guangxi](#) Zhuang Autonomous Region), which has attracted some attention. An article in the Independent, published in June 2015, [estimated](#) that there are about 10,000 dogs slaughtered at the event each year which are then barbequed, stir-fired or boiled for human consumption<sup>14</sup>. Last year, AnimalsAsia reported in June 2014, that posters were [reportedly being put](#) up to encourage people there to think twice before attending<sup>15</sup>.

In June 2015, when the festival takes place, a global social media campaign was launched: the Twitter hashtag [#stopyulin2015](#) has been used hundreds of thousands of times this year and a Facebook group, [Stop Yulin Dog & Cat Meat Festival 2015](#), has more than 17,000

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<sup>10</sup> Voiceless Friends, [Dog Meat Trade](#), accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

<sup>11</sup> Taipei Times, [Activists expose dog meat trade](#), January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011

<sup>12</sup> [English.news.cn](#), [Eating cats, dogs could be outlawed](#), January 27<sup>th</sup> 2010

<sup>13</sup> Department of Justice Hong Kong, [Slaughter of dog or cat for food prohibited](#), retrieved Oct 30<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>14</sup> The Independent, [Yulin Dog Meat Festival: Netizens rally in defence of event that will see 10,000 cats and dogs slaughtered](#), June 19<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>15</sup> Animals Asia, [With Yulin, China dog eating festival on the horizon, Animals Asia addresses open letter to local government](#), June 2014

“likes”. [A Change.org petition](#) against the event by the US animal rights group Duo Duo closed after attracting more than 200,000 signatures. Though, as an article in the Independent published in June 2015 states, there is some scepticism at how effective these campaigns are<sup>9</sup>:

Yet the pressure such campaigns exert on Chinese authorities is slight, limited both by the government’s dismissive attitude towards outside opinion and by the fact that Twitter and Facebook are both blocked in the country. Furthermore, there has been a backlash from Chinese “netizens” – Chinese slang for online citizens – against finger-wagging foreigners.

“Dog-meat eating is a custom belonging to other people, the same way that people of the Islamic Hui ethnic group doesn’t eat pork,” one netizen wrote. “They won’t protest us for eating pork. We should mutually respect each other. If you don’t want to eat something, then don’t.” Another wrote: “Let’s all protest the Christmas practice of eating turkey!”<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Charity Campaigns

There are a number of charities which campaign to end the practice of eating dog meat. [The Kennel Club has a campaign](#) that encourages its members to write to the Chinese, South Korean and Filipino ambassadors about the animal welfare of the dogs in the dog meat trade<sup>16</sup>. [AnimalsAsia](#), an animal welfare charity that works to end the trade in dogs and cats for food in China and Vietnam, has a series of useful documents, [Tackling the Meat Trade](#), published in June 2015. Tackling the Meat Trade details their four-year investigation into the dog meat industry in China<sup>17</sup>. There are four reports in total, which detail different parts of the dog meat trade, including where the dogs are sourced from, information about the black market, media reports from 2001-2015 and attitudes to eating dog meat in China.

The report:

...uncovered no evidence of any large-scale breeding facilities in the country, supporting long-standing claims that the majority of so-called “meat dogs” are in fact stolen companion animals and strays<sup>17</sup>.

The CEO and founder of AnimalsAsia, Jill Robinson MBE, concluded:

“Our investigations strongly point to what everybody familiar with the industry has long suspected – that the vast majority of China’s dog meat comes from stolen companion animals and that misinformation and illegality is rife at every stage of the industry supply chain.”<sup>17</sup>

The [Soi Dog Foundation](#), a charitable organisation which works to improve the lives of dogs and cats in Thailand and end the dog meat trade, has claimed that every year tens of thousands of dogs “*are inhumanely transported from Thailand to neighbouring countries where they are butchered by cruel and barbaric methods*”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> The Kennel Club, [Dog Meat, Kennel Club Campaigns](#), accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

<sup>17</sup> Animals Asia, [Tackling the Meat Trade](#), June 2015

<sup>18</sup> Soi Dog Foundation, [Help End the Dog Meat Trade!](#), accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

The condition under which dogs are transported before being killed for their meat is a particular issue that many charities draw attention to. [Animal Rights Action](#) claims that dogs are often forced into sacks or tiny cages in which they can barely move. When transported they often “go for days without water, slowly dying of dehydration”. The Soi Dog Foundation also claims that many [dogs are tortured](#) in the hours before they are killed because people believe that the pain inflicted helps to tenderise the meat<sup>13</sup>.

A number of articles in British newspapers have also drawn attention to the condition in which dogs are transported and kept in before being killed for human consumption. The [Daily Mail](#) reported in 2014 that 1,500 dogs were discovered crammed in to tiny cages on their way to restaurants in China; many were malnourished or dehydrated<sup>19</sup>.

The [Guardian](#) also has drawn attention to the black market trade of dogs from Thailand, where hundreds of thousands of pet dogs are snatched every year and then smuggled into Vietnam for human consumption – often in appalling conditions.

## 4. Parliamentary Activity

There have been a number of Early Day Motions tabled on the dog meat trade over the years. The most recent, tabled in June 2015, is [EDM 134](#) on ‘Yulin Dog Meat Festival 2015’. The Motion is as follows:

That this House condemns the plans to go ahead with the Yulin Dog Meat Festival 2015 in Yulin, China; expresses deep concern at the cruel and inhumane manner in which dogs have been slaughtered in the past; notes the terrible conditions that dogs face prior to being killed as they are held in overcrowded cages without water; and urges the Chinese authorities to intercede to stop the festival from taking place.

At present, it has attracted 42 signatures from Members.

On 28 January 2015 several MPs attended a [briefing in the House of Commons](#), by John McDonnell MP, on the dog meat trade. Many of the MPs in attendance signed the following petition:

We, the undersigned MP’s, hereby call upon the governments of Cambodia, China, Laos PDR, Indonesia, South Korea, The Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to take action to end the production, trade in, and slaughtering of dogs and cats for the purposes of meat and by-products.

In recognition of:

- The mounting body of evidence linking the consumption of such meat to human health and disease transmission notably cholera and trichinellosis.
- The universal acceptance that the uncontrolled movement of unvaccinated dogs is the main cause for the spread of rabies.

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<sup>19</sup> The Mail Online, [Dispatch-frontline-war-against-Thailands-dog-meat-trade](#), October 29<sup>th</sup> 2014

- The increasing number of pet animals brutally stolen for the purpose of meat and skin production.
- The significant impact the production of, trade in, slaughtering and consumption of dog and cat meat poses to animal welfare.
- The increasing awareness of the suffering of fur bearing animals, including dogs and cats, whose skin and fur products are widely exported and sold.

There can be no excuse for the intolerable suffering and cruelty these animals are facing as a result of this trade. The time has come to end it<sup>20</sup>.

## 4.1 UK Government's Position

Because there are no international laws or agreements prohibiting the consumption of dog meat, the UK Government is limited in what it can do to stop such activities. It is unable, for instance, to intervene or take trade measures against countries where the consumption of dog meat is regarded as culturally acceptable. The Foreign Office has previously raised UK concerns on this issue with the governments of China and the Philippines, while the UK ambassador in Seoul has also raised concerns with the South Korean Government.

In November 2014, in [response to a PQ](#) on the killing of domestic dogs in Vietnam for human consumption, a Foreign Office Minister responded by saying that:

In the absence of international norms, laws or agreements governing the trade and consumption of dog meat, it is a matter for the authorities in each country to introduce and enforce the necessary legislation to end the ill treatment of animals. However, the UK takes seriously reports of animal cruelty throughout the world and is committed to raising standards of animal welfare at home and abroad. I will make my views known during my forthcoming visit to Vietnam.

On 4th September 2015 [Kirsten Oswald](#) asked a written question to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about Far East animal welfare:

Q: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations his Department has made to its counterpart in (a) South Korea and (b) China on the use of cats and dogs for food (i) in general and (ii) in the Yulin and Bok Nal festivals.<sup>21</sup>

A: Mr Hugo Swire

The Government is committed to raising standards of animal welfare at home and abroad. In a number of countries, including the Republic of Korea and China, the sale and consumption of dog meat is legal, although the practice of eating dog soup (posintang) in the Republic of Korea during Boknal is declining rapidly as attitudes change. There are no international norms,

<sup>20</sup> Change.org, [Support The UK Parliament's Call To End The Dog Meat Trade!](#), accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Business, publication and records, [Far East: Animal Welfare: Written question - 8904](#), September 4<sup>th</sup> 2015



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laws or agreements governing the trade and consumption of dog and cat meat. Instead we seek to work with governments around the world to gain agreement to animal welfare standards and to phase out cruel and inhumane farming and trapping practices. Ministers have raised this issue with Chinese counterparts and explained that UK Parliamentarians and the public want to see regulation that would bring the practice to an end. Our Ambassador in Seoul has delivered similar messages to South Korean authorities. Our officials will continue to highlight our concerns.<sup>21</sup>

On Thursday 5 November 2015 MPs will take part in a debate on the dog meat trade. [This debate was scheduled by the Backbench Business Committee](#) following [a bid from Robert Flello MP](#), who stated the aim of the debate was:

Put pressure on the countries that are involved in this appalling and barbaric trade to do something about it, and ideally to end it permanently<sup>22</sup>.

Chris Grayling, the leader of the house, made a comment about the debate on the dog meat trade in response to a question during the [Business of the House 29th October 2015](#), where he welcomed the debate stating that it was:

A sign of the concern in this House about the welfare of dogs, and most people in this country do not support the dog meat trade at all<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> House of Commons, Backbench business, uncorrected transcript, [Representations taken before the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday 20th October 2015](#)

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons, Hansard Debates, [Business of the house, Column 483](#), 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015

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