

# Social media platforms to face £18m fines for publishing animal cruelty content

Publication Date: 2023-09-07

Author: Dan Milmo

Section: Technology

Tags: Technology, Animal welfare, Animals, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/sep/07/social-media-platforms-to-face-18m-fines-for-publishing-animal-cruelty-content>



Social media firms must remove animal cruelty content from their platforms or face the threat of substantial fines under the latest change to the online safety bill. Ministers said causing unnecessary suffering to an animal will become a priority offence in the bill, which means tech firms will have to proactively prevent such material from reaching users. Failure to do so could result in a fine of £18m, or up to 10% of a company's global revenue. The technology secretary, Michelle Donelan, said animal cruelty was something an animal-friendly country like the UK should not tolerate. "Social media sites must not be used as platforms to promote the sadistic and harrowing actions of some deeply depraved internet users, and today we're taking steps to make sure it is swiftly removed so both animals and users can be protected," she said in a statement. The change means that animal cruelty becomes a "priority offence" under the bill, the most serious illegal content that must be tackled by platforms, which includes child sexual abuse images and terrorist content. Under the amendment to the bill, which is expected to receive royal assent this month, platforms will have to put in place systems and procedures to deal with material that encourages or facilitates animal torture. The amendment had been proposed in the House of Lords by Labour peer Baroness Merron. The government cited the example of the Monkey Haters case, a BBC investigation that uncovered a global monkey-torture ring. The BBC found that Facebook was hosting "dozens" of monkey-torture groups, although the social media network said it had taken down the groups brought to its attention by the BBC and they "don't allow the promotion of animal abuse on our platforms". Ministers are moving to tie up loose ends with the legislation after the House of Lords backed several changes. On Wednesday the government sought to head off a threatened exodus from the UK by encrypted messaging apps, saying that a controversial clause in the bill paving the way for message scanning would only be used if the process was "technically feasible" and if it met minimum standards of privacy and accuracy.