

HOW TO LOBBY YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

USE YOUR VOICE TO HELP ANIMALS!

Your Member of Parliament (MP) can play a significant role in bringing or keeping certain issues on the political agenda. While signing a petition or sending a campaign postcard to a government official is an important way to get a message across, direct and personal contact at a local level is even more effective.

Who is my MP?

You can find out who your MP is by typing in your postal code on the following website:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/>

WHY IS LOBBYING MPS IMPORTANT?

MPs have the power to take action on specific issues in a number of ways. Even if they don't agree with your point of view they are obliged to relay your concerns to the relevant minister. They can also raise the issue, show support for an issue and request a debate in Parliament. Outside of Parliament they can write articles to papers or speak publicly. The more that MPs hear about a concern from their constituents, the more likely they are to take action.

DOES IT MATTER IF I DID NOT VOTE FOR MY MP OR IF MY MP'S PARTY IS NOT IN POWER?

No. You can contact your MP regardless of which party you support. An MP represents the constituents in their riding. All MPs have influence in Parliament.

FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR MP:

Before contacting your MP you may want to find out more information about him or her. By learning about your MP's position on certain issues you can determine how knowledgeable they are and what feelings they have about a particular issue. Therefore, you will be able address him or her more appropriately and determine how you might want to present your issue.

Consider the following when researching your MP:

- What did he/she do before becoming an MP?
- Does he/she have a personal interest in animal welfare or the environment?
- What is your MP's party position? Remember, MPs are guided by the policies of their parties. Check the party website for the party positions on different issues.
- Does your MP currently hold a certain position in the government?
- Have they held a certain position in the past?
- Does he/she sit on a certain committee?
- Is your constituency a swing riding, i.e. did your MP only marginally get elected? (Your MP may be more responsive to your concerns if the majority is slim).
- Is your MP new or has he/she been representing the constituency for a long time?
- What is your MP's voting patterns in Parliament? You can find this out by contacting his or her office.

The simplest way to find out about your MP's background and current responsibilities is to use the Internet. Start with your MP's website. You can also check your local newspaper and any updates you might receive from him or her.

KNOW YOUR STUFF!

Before writing, calling, or meeting with your MP research your topic. This does not mean that you have to be an expert on the issue, but you will be able to make a much stronger case if you know the issue well. Be sure that you can back up your case! You may find that you know more about the issue than your MP. Remember that MPs need be informed of a very large range of issues. Even if your MP knows little about the topic or doesn't appear to be concerned it is important that you continue to keep raising your concerns. It is your MP's responsibility to make his/her constituent's concerns known.

CONTACTING YOUR MP:

Writing a Letter: You may wish to start with a letter explaining your point of view. For advice on how to write an effective letter, please see IFAW Letter Writing Tips. You can also ask to meet with your MP about the issue in your letter. Remember to ask for a reply!

Sending an email: Many MPs find email the easiest way to communicate with constituents. When writing emails follow the same suggestions for letter writing. Include your full address to show that you are a constituent.

Making a telephone call: You are unlikely to speak to your MP the first time you call and will probably talk to an MP's assistant. Remember that this person is key in informing your MP about the issues that are important to constituents. Note the person's name and title. Keep your conversation short, polite and provide the person a brief, but clear summary of your purpose. If you would like, let the staff member know that you want to meet with your MP to discuss the issue. If you can't get an appointment with your MP ask the staff member to speak to the person who works on the issue you are concerned about. If you get an answering machine, leave a short message with your contact information.

Important Note:

Always represent yourself as a concerned citizen - you are not a representative of IFAW.

MEETING WITH YOUR MP:

Before the meeting:

- Remember for a bigger impact you need to keep the focus on one issue. Make a list of some key points that you want to raise. Keep arguments simple and concise as you may not have a lot of time with your MP and you do not want to overwhelm him or her. Think about the common arguments raised against the issue you are bringing forth and what you will say about these concerns. Anticipate questions your MP may ask. A rehearsal is a great idea!

- Gather Materials: You may want to bring photographs, diagrams, and graphs that illustrate your point. These are easy to grasp without a lot of reading. You will also leave a more effective impression on your MP if you bring a packet of materials such as supporting editorials, and letters to the editor or news items that illustrate your

issue. In addition, you can bring along a petition

or letters from other constituents who share your concerns. You will have a greater impact if you can demonstrate that not just a small segment of the population is sympathetic to your cause.

- If you would like, take along another person who shares your concerns to the meeting. The benefit is that one person can watch for non-verbal communication and take notes as well as think while the other is speaking. More than two people can make communication difficult. Make sure that the other person knows the issue that you are discussing thoroughly and always keep a united front. Do not give the official the opportunity to see any disagreements between you.

Should I mention my own political opinions?

It's often worth saying if you support the MP's party or if you are an undecided voter. You could hint that an MP's actions may pay off in terms of votes.

Share the knowledge:

Be sure to make IFAW aware about what you learned concerning your MP's position. If your MP is keen to work more closely with IFAW please let us know!

- Remember appearance is important. Be punctual too!

During the Meeting:

- Keep your presentation short and concise as you will be restricted in time. It's worth asking at the start how much time you have with them. Make clear exactly what action you wish your MP to take. It is important to listen carefully to your MP even if his or her view differs from your own. This will give you important clues about how to 'pitch' your information, how much your MP knows about the issue and misunderstandings they have about the issue. Do write down any specific comments made by your MP.

- Press for a commitment. Ask specifically for your MP's position on the issue. Don't let your MP evade the issue or change the subject. Listen very carefully to what your MP agrees to do. MPs often make statements that sound agreeable, but which really are noncommittal. If this happens, you might want to diplomatically suggest some firmer action on their part. An undertaking from your MP to write to the Minister on your behalf is one action for which you can ask or you can ask them to bring up the issue in Parliament.

Quotations:

Why not quote something that your MP has said in the past to highlight your point?

- Always point out when other local people share your concerns. For instance, you could mention the recent activities of local Animal Welfare groups or indicate the number of signature collected on petitions.

- Don't be intimidated! If you can't answer a question, simply say that you don't know, but that you will find out. Get necessary contact information and provide the answer and information to a staff member as soon as possible.

- A staff member (or staffer) might be present. These are very important people as they often play a key role in controlling the advice to MPs and helping with their heavy workload. You should note the name of that person, make sure that you keep them informed in the future and, if possible, develop a working relationship with them.

- Make constructive points, offering solutions rather than criticism. Think hard about what might persuade your MP to listen to your concerns. You will more likely get your MP's consideration if you demonstrate that many constituents share the same concern and suggest that they will get local publicity as a result of listening to you. Put a local and personal approach on the issue. Emphasize why this topic concerns you and others that your MP represents.

- Don't forget to ask your MP for advice on how to move your issue forward whether it be in Parliament or in other ways that may be helpful to you.

After the meeting:

- Follow up your meeting with a note to thank the MP. Include a reminder of the key points raised and key decisions that were made.

- Always make sure that anything you promise to do is followed up as quickly as possible!

- If your MP asked questions or was interested in one aspect of your conversation, seize the occasion to follow up with a letter, information sheet, phone call, or second meeting. Elected officials will respond better if they see you as providing information useful to them, rather than just pushing your own agenda.

- A first visit should never be the end of contact. Make sure you or someone in your group stays in touch with the staff on the issue.

