



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Pet welfare and abuse

Second Report of Session 2023–24

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 26 March 2024*

HC 161

Published on 5 April 2024
by authority of the House of Commons

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Summary

Over half of UK adults own a pet, and the country is often described as a nation of animal lovers. During our inquiry, however, we heard serious concerns about the risks posed to pet welfare by practices including unscrupulous breeding, the proliferation of Canine Fertility Clinics, the breeding of so-called ‘designer’ dogs, and abhorrent acts of abuse and mutilation. We considered the risks associated with pet importation, including puppy smuggling, the import of heavily pregnant and very young pets, the import of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails, and declawed cats, and the management of biosecurity. We took evidence from a wide range of sector experts on how existing legislation should be improved in order to provide stronger animal welfare safeguards, and robustly penalise those who seek to circumvent the law.

Throughout our inquiry we heard strong sector support for bringing forward all of the measures proposed under the withdrawn Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill 2021–22 as a matter of urgency. While the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (2018) Regulations have helped establish a framework for higher welfare standards, these should be made more robust in order to clamp down on breeders who undercut standards to maximise profit. The Government should introduce a new Veterinary Surgeons Act to ensure that it is fit to tackle 21st century challenges. In particular, it must provide appropriate regulation for Canine Fertility Clinics, and introduce stringent and proportionate penalties for individuals who illegally perform acts of veterinary surgery. While the Animal Welfare Act 2006 prohibits the carrying out of mutilations such as ear cropping, tail docking, and declawing of cats, the import of animals with these mutilations is not currently prohibited, and this loophole should be closed as a matter of priority.

Our inquiry’s key findings and recommendations are:

The Government’s withdrawal of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill stalled progress on key animal welfare issues. These delays have allowed the continuation of poor animal welfare practices. The Department must ensure that every provision from the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill is brought into force during the current Parliament. We welcome the introduction of Private Members’ bills that will take forward vital animal welfare measures, but note that the Government was relying heavily on Members who were successful in the Private Members’ bill ballot being willing to take on its handout bills to deliver its manifesto promises, rather than committing to bringing forward the legislation itself. While on this occasion it may prove successful, it was nonetheless a risky strategy.

It is estimated that less than half of puppies entering the market are from licensed breeders. The lack of traceability enables unscrupulous, low welfare breeding practices to flourish under the radar. More stringent safeguards are needed to ensure robust protections for the welfare of dogs and their puppies. The Department should improve traceability of dog breeding by introducing legislation to reduce the litter licensing threshold from three to two per 12-month period.

Cat breeding is becoming an increasingly accessible and lucrative business, but there are few legal safeguards to protect cats and their kittens. Cat breeding should be awarded the same legislative safeguards as awarded to dogs under Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations.

The sharp rise in Canine Fertility Clinics from 37 in 2020, to over 400 currently, is of significant concern, particularly given their association with the breeding of so-called ‘designer’ dogs, such as brachycephalic breeds, and other breeds whose extreme characteristics have the potential to compromise health and welfare. The Government should make it a priority to introduce legislation to reform the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) to include Canine Fertility Clinics. The current £100 fine for performing acts of veterinary surgery illegally is a derisory deterrent. The Government should bring this fine in line with the penalties under The Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022.

Local authority animal welfare officers play a vital role in the licensing and enforcement activities that help protect animals. However, the ability of local authorities to perform regulatory activities is constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training, and inadequate funding and resources. This results in an inconsistent approach nationally. A central unit of suitably trained inspectors should be established which can be utilised by local authorities to improve collaboration and disseminate best practice.

Mutilations such as ear cropping, cosmetic tail docking and declawing are ethically abhorrent procedures with lasting welfare implications. The Government should close the loophole that allows the importation of mutilated animals as a matter of urgency, and certainly before the end of the current Parliament. Alongside this, the Government should legislate to restrict the possession, hosting, sale and supply of DIY ear cropping kits, which are all too easy to purchase online.

Carriers, meaning ferry companies or the Eurotunnel, play a key role in the pet importation and checking process, but it is not evident that carriers are striking the right balance between speed, checks, profit and identifying non-compliance. We have strong concerns about the robustness of a pet importation system that is based on 100% documentary checks at ports. This has implications for both biosecurity and smuggling. Puppy smuggling is perceived as a low risk, high reward crime, with the potential for sizeable profitmaking. To clamp down on smuggling, and prevent the import of very young puppies and heavily pregnant dogs, the Government should implement:

- A reduction on the number of dogs and cats that can be imported by an individual into the UK from five per person to five per vehicle, and three per foot or air passenger.
- A ban on the importation of puppies and kittens under six months.
- A ban on the importation of pregnant dogs and cats in the last 30% of gestation.

1 Background and scope of inquiry

1. We launched our inquiry into Pet Welfare and Abuse in February 2023. We held a public call for evidence, inviting submissions that addressed unscrupulous breeding and importation; abuse and mutilation; ownership and animal welfare; and current preventative measures.¹ We received 80 written evidence submissions, and held five oral evidence sessions, taking evidence from a range of sector bodies, charities and other experts. In the final session, we took evidence from Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs at the time of our inquiry.

2. Our report has nine chapters. Chapter two considers animal welfare legislation; chapter three considers pet breeding, both licensed and unlicensed; chapter four considers Canine Fertility Clinics and demand for so-called ‘designer’ dog breeds; chapter five looks at pet abuse and mutilation; chapter six examines monitoring and enforcement by local authorities; chapter seven examines pet importation, including incidence and smuggling; chapter eight examines biosecurity risks and pre-import health checks; and chapter nine considers responsibility, monitoring and enforcement for pet importation.

1 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Pet welfare and abuse: Call for evidence](#), February 2023

2 Animal Welfare Legislation

3. In June 2021, the Government introduced the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill to the House of Commons. The Bill aimed to deliver on commitments in the Conservative Party's 2019 Manifesto and the Government's 2021 Action Plan for Animal Welfare.² Provisions in the Bill included the keeping of primates as pets; livestock worrying; the export of live animals for slaughter or fattening; and the importation of dogs, cats and ferrets.³

4. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill was withdrawn on 8 June 2023. The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries, the Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP, stated that the Bill risked being amended to extend "far beyond" its original scope of manifesto commitments.⁴ There was strong support from the animal welfare sector for the measures proposed under the original Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, and we heard widespread concern about the lack of progress of these measures, and consensus that these should be brought forward as a matter of urgency.⁵

5. Despite the withdrawal of the Bill in June 2023, Lord Benyon told us that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was "reasonably confident" it would be able to legislate for the manifesto commitments and noted plans for further animal welfare legislation, including bringing in a new offence of pet abduction.⁶ The Minister told us that while the Government was keen to avoid introducing primary legislation,⁷ it would examine a number of means including Private Members' bills,⁸ and secondary legislation to place these animal welfare measures on the statute book.⁹

6. In November 2023, the Government announced it would introduce measures on livestock exports, making it an offence to export live livestock, including cattle, horses and sheep, for fattening and/or slaughter.¹⁰ A number of further animal welfare measures have been timetabled.¹¹ The Government has laid a draft statutory instrument under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, intended to introduce a licensing scheme for the keeping of primates. Licensing is expected to come into force by 2026.¹²

7. The Government's withdrawal of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill introduced in 2021, has stalled progress on key animal welfare issues. These delays have allowed the continuation of poor animal welfare practices. The then Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs assured us that the Department was "reasonably confident" it will be able to get all of its manifesto commitments into law. We welcome

2 Conservative Party, [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#), November 2019; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), May 2021

3 UK Parliament, [Animal Welfare \(Kept Animals\) Bill 2021–22](#), [withdrawn 8 June 2023]

4 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Oral statement to Parliament: Animal Welfare Statement](#), May 2023

5 See, for example: [Q35](#) [Dr Shotton; Dr Wensley; Sarah Carr]; [Q72](#) [Jessica Stark]; RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

6 [Q334](#)

7 [Q377](#); [Q383](#)

8 [Q339](#)

9 [Q383](#)

10 House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Live Exports\) Bill 2023–24](#), January 2024

11 Ongoing Bills include the Livestock Exports Bill; the Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets Bill; and the Pet Abduction Bill.

12 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Press release: Government delivers on promise to ban keeping of primates](#), December 2023; House of Lords Library, [New licensing for pet primates](#), February 2024

the recent introduction of Bills on welfare measures including livestock worrying; puppy imports; the importation of dogs, cats and ferrets; and pet abduction. We further note that the Government was relying heavily on Members who were successful in the Private Members bill ballot being willing to take on its handout bills to deliver its manifesto promises, rather than committing to bringing forward the legislation itself. While on this occasion it may prove successful, it was nonetheless a risky strategy.

8. *In order to implement much-needed robust animal welfare safeguards, the Department must ensure that every provision from the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill is brought into force during the current Parliament.*

3 Pet Breeding

9. Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (LAIA) Regulations 2018, local authorities can grant licences for certain activities including selling animals as pets, dog breeding and providing boarding for dogs and cats.¹³

10. Licences for dog breeding include conditions intended to protect dogs and their litters from pain, suffering, injury, and disease. Licensed breeders are also required to have written procedures in place for the prevention and spread of disease.¹⁴ Defra is currently undertaking a statutory post-implementation review of these regulations. In November 2023, we heard from Lord Benyon that Defra is finalising its review, which it expects to be published in early 2024.¹⁵ A subsequent letter from the Department to the Committee, dated February 2024, confirmed that publication is expected “as soon as possible”.¹⁶

Unlicensed breeding

11. Lord Benyon told us that “It is quite difficult to assess the ratio of licensed to unlicensed dog breeders in England. No official data exists on the number of unlicensed breeders”.¹⁷ The RSPCA estimates that under half of puppies entering the market are from licensed breeders, leaving the remaining half to be filled by puppies that are imported, bred by unlicensed breeders, including individuals breeding from their own pets.¹⁸ Dr Paula Boyden, Veterinary Director, Dogs Trust, told us that as many as 90% of puppies may come from unlicensed breeders.¹⁹ Dr Sam Gaines, Head of Companion Animals, RSPCA, warned that a significant proportion of puppies are bred by people who are acting illegally and irresponsibly within this country,²⁰ further outlining:

If we go back to the figures in 2015, around that time we had about 900 licensed breeders. They were producing around 70,000 puppies. If we then think about the number of puppies we need to maintain the normal adult population, we are talking about 600,000 a year. There is a great demand on unlicensed breeders and the people who are importing. That poses a really serious risk.²¹

12. We heard that it is likely that increased public demand for dogs has driven low welfare breeding practices,²² with unscrupulous breeders undercutting standards to maximise profit.²³ A dog will have around six puppies per litter, with the average price of a puppy reaching £1,329 in April 2022.²⁴ Witnesses informed us that high demand and high

13 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Animal activity licensing process: statutory guidance for local authorities](#), October 2023

14 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

15 [Q345](#) [Lord Benyon]; [Q352](#) [Marc Casale]

16 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Correspondence to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Defra Post Implementation Reviews \(PIRs\) – February update](#), February 2024

17 [Q342](#)

18 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

19 [Q59](#)

20 [Q89](#)

21 [Q90](#)

22 [Q10](#) [Dr Wensley]; Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation ([PWA0026](#))

23 [Q94](#) [Marisa Heath]

24 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#))

prices for puppies during the Covid-19 pandemic attracted unscrupulous breeders,²⁵ and an estimated 29% of puppies purchased during the pandemic were sick.²⁶ Low-welfare breeding can pose a risk to public as well as animal health. For example, puppies raised in crowded, unsanitary conditions are at risk of diseases such as Canine parvovirus and Giardia.²⁷

13. The rise in numbers of poorly bred and unsocialised dogs may be linked to increases in dog attacks and dog bite incidences.²⁸ Witnesses further highlighted behavioural issues associated with the breeding and rearing of dogs in low welfare conditions.²⁹ Dr Sean Wensley, Senior Veterinary Surgeon for Animal Welfare and Professional Engagement, PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals), described the triple combination of poor breeding practices, poor socialisation and poor access to training as “a recipe for disaster”.³⁰

14. There is a lack of public awareness about licensed breeding. PDSA's 2023 PAW report identified that only 35% of dog owners had heard of local authority licensing of breeders, and of those dog owners who had acquired their pet from a breeder, only 42% had checked that the breeder was licensed by the local authority.³¹ Some breeders will be legally unlicensed because they fall below the three-litter threshold specified under LAIA regulations,³² however, this distinction may not be clear to members of the public. Legally unlicensed breeders include hobby breeders, who adhere to high welfare breeding practices, and who may sell or give puppies to friends or family.³³

15. While there was general agreement that LAIA regulations have established a framework for higher animal welfare standards, there was widespread consensus amongst animal welfare groups that the regulations need strengthening.³⁴ The Kennel Club went further, however, and described current breeding legislation as “not fit for purpose”, suggesting that the regulations are “failing responsible breeders, failing the dog buying public and most importantly failing the dogs it seeks to protect.”³⁵

16. The need for improved traceability of breeders was a key theme of our evidence,³⁶ with Dr Boyden telling us that “until we start to get a handle on that traceability it is a problem.”³⁷ The lack of traceability enables individuals to evade breeding licensing requirements, bypass welfare standards, and fall under the radar of local authority inspectors.³⁸ We heard a range of recommendations for potential statutory changes that could be implemented to tackle unscrupulous, low welfare breeding. These included:

25 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

26 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#))

27 Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation ([PWA0026](#)); Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) ([PWA0031](#))

28 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

29 [Q89](#) [Dr Gaines]

30 [Q11](#) [Dr Wensley]

31 PDSA ([PWA0050](#))

32 [Q59](#) [Dr Boyden]

33 [Q102](#) [Marisa Heath]

34 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

35 The Kennel Club ([PWA0015](#))

36 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#)); Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

37 [Q59](#)

38 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

- Registering all breeders, regardless of number of litters bred or failure to meet the commercial threshold, in order to provide clarity on the origin of the puppy for local authority inspectors and the general public.³⁹
- Reducing the litter threshold for requiring a licence from three to two per year, alongside a requirement for all breeders to be registered from the first litter. Battersea Dogs & Cats Home suggested that these measures would allow for accidental litters and provide total traceability, whilst raising welfare standards.⁴⁰
- The introduction of a centralised, publicly accessible list of registered and licensed breeders, to be kept or facilitated by the Department, and a requirement to display a registration number on dog sale adverts.⁴¹

Protection from pain, injury and disease

17. Under LAIA regulations, no dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health that breeding from it could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring.⁴² Naturewatch describes this protection as a “welcome addition”, but notes that the legislation only applies to dog breeders who meet current licensing thresholds.⁴³

18. Enforcement of LAIA regulations is essential to tackle poor breeding practices, for example the breeding of dogs with innate health conditions, however, the sector has highlighted concerns about the wording of the legislation.⁴⁴ Paws Against suggests that the phrase “reasonably be expected” is ambiguous and may provide a loophole should a breeder face prosecution.⁴⁵ While theoretically the law should serve to protect the welfare of the breeding dog or its progeny, Dr Wensley told us that this piece of legislation has not yet been tested in the courts.⁴⁶ Dr Gaines described it as “very difficult for local authority enforcers to understand that guidance”, further explaining:

We would like DEFRA to produce much clearer guidance so the enforcers understand what the guidance actually means. We can look at Scotland as a good example. They list the breeds of dogs for which it is unlikely that a licence will be given for the breeding of individuals.⁴⁷

Puppy yoga

19. During the course of our inquiry media and stakeholder concerns arose regarding the growing trend of ‘puppy yoga’; classes in which very young puppies are placed in a studio alongside participants practicing yoga. We note that there are also ‘kitty yoga’ sessions currently being advertised, on which we hold similar concerns as to animal welfare

39 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Pet Industry Federation ([PWA0053](#))

40 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

41 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

42 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

43 Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#))

44 Blue Cross ([PWA0043](#))

45 Paws Against ([PWA0006](#))

46 [Q28](#)

47 [Q97](#)

implications. Organisers of puppy yoga claim that the dogs' participation allows them to be socialised at a young age.⁴⁸ However, these puppies are potentially unvaccinated, may be denied access to adequate food or water, and may find the situation stressful.⁴⁹

20. Dr Wensley highlighted that the trend raises issues of respecting animals and of commodifying cute animals for human gain.⁵⁰ Dr Gaines similarly described puppy yoga as “a really good example of puppies being used as commodities [...] the extent to which those puppies were deprived of natural behaviour was truly shocking.”⁵¹ Dr Shotton, Senior Vice President, British Veterinary Association (BVA), told us of:

serious concerns about the welfare of those puppies [...] we would be concerned that it is a marketing tool for puppy sales, and irresponsible puppy sales [...] We would be very worried about unvaccinated puppies potentially mixing with other unvaccinated pups and their potential welfare compromise, and the fact that then members of the public might be encouraged to impulse buy these pups without thinking things through.⁵²

21. We asked Minister Benyon whether the Department is considering taking steps to address animal welfare implications of the puppy yoga trend. Marc Casale, Deputy Director for Animal Welfare, Defra, told us that puppy yoga “is definitely on the radar”.⁵³ However, the Minister told us that:

we do not have any plans to legislate against it. There must be a common-sense element here where providers of yoga classes can realise where they are doing harm [...] It is very difficult to legislate for stupidity.⁵⁴

Cat Breeding

22. Cat breeding is not a licensable activity under LAIA regulations, resulting in few legal safeguards to protect pregnant cats and their kittens.⁵⁵ There is strong sector support, however, for regulatory controls to help safeguard cats and kittens against poor breeding conditions, such as instances where individuals repeatedly breed from the same queen up to three times a year.⁵⁶ There are a range of health conditions for female cats associated with pregnancy such as dystocia, mastitis, uterine infections, torsion and rupture. Older unneutered cats are also at increased risk of conditions including pyometras and mammary tumours.⁵⁷

48 See, for example: ITV News, [Puppy yoga 'commodifying cute animals' MPs told after ITV News investigation](#), July 2023; RSPCA, [RSPCA urges animal-lovers to say no to puppy yoga classes](#), July 2023

49 [Qq2-4](#)

50 [Q3](#)

51 [Q112](#)

52 [Q2](#)

53 [Q353](#)

54 [Q351](#)

55 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

56 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

57 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

23. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home warned that cat breeding is becoming an increasingly accessible and lucrative business, attracting unscrupulous individuals who take advantage of the lack of regulation in order to maximise profits.⁵⁸ Dr Maggie Roberts, Director of Feline Welfare, Cats Protection, told us:

It has only recently been licensed in Scotland. We very much welcome and, as an organisation, we call for licensing. There is no regulation at all, so as the increasing demand is happening for people to buy cats, and particularly pedigrees, then people are often breeding in very poor conditions. There is an increasing trend for not just pedigrees but also extreme breeds.⁵⁹

24. Cats Protection recommends that licences should be required for any individual breeding two or more litters a year, alongside further measures including a maximum of six litters per lifetime; a maximum of three litters within a two-year period; and no breeding from queens after age six.⁶⁰ Battersea Dogs and Cats Home similarly recommends that cat breeding should be made a regulated activity under LAIAR, to afford cats the same genetic and physical health protections that exist for dog breeding.⁶¹

25. When we questioned the Department on this issue, Minister Benyon stated that the Department is working “very closely” with Cats Protection and other organisations to examine whether the impacts on breeding of cats are being effectively tackled by existing legislation and regulation.⁶² Minister Benyon further noted:

there are some general reasons to be concerned about the situation for breeding cats. These include the health and welfare problems associated with certain breeds and other issues relating to breeding for particular aesthetic purposes. We want to ensure that there are proper regulations in place.⁶³

Pedigree and ‘designer’ cats

26. The sector highlighted rising demand for cats bred for exaggerated physical traits, such as Scottish Fold, Persian and Munchkin breeds, warning that these breeds are prone to a range of health and welfare issues, including chronic pain and arthritis.⁶⁴ Dr Ravetz, Chief Veterinary Officer, Pets at Home, explained that the same health and welfare issues associated with extreme conformation and brachycephaly⁶⁵ in dog breeding are being mirrored in the cat population.⁶⁶ Cats Protection further calls for a ban on breeding cats with genetic deformities or other conditions affecting their welfare.⁶⁷

58 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

59 [Q60](#)

60 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

61 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

62 [Q348](#)

63 [Q348](#)

64 [Q60](#) [Dr Roberts]; RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

65 Brachycephaly refers to flat-faced breeds, further information can be found on the website of the [Brachycephalic Working Group](#).

66 [Q177](#)

67 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

27. Stakeholders raised concerns about the hybridisation of cats and wild cats, that can result in welfare issues for both the breeding cats and their offspring.⁶⁸ Exotic hybrid cat breeds are among the highest priced cats, but we heard that these breeds are unsuited to domestic environments due to their specific welfare needs.⁶⁹ Dr Roberts explained that these breeds show aggressive behavioural traits, noting that “people get them because they are beautiful, but they are not very good pets.”⁷⁰ Organisations including Cats Protection and the Canine and Feline Sector Group have called on the Government to ban the importation and breeding of hybrid cats.⁷¹

28. **It is estimated that less than half of puppies entering the market are from licensed breeders. Many breeders will be unlicensed because they fall below the three-litter threshold specified under LAIA regulations, effectively making them untraceable. The lack of traceability enables unscrupulous, low welfare breeding practices to flourish under the radar. More stringent safeguards are needed to ensure robust protections for the welfare of dogs and their puppies.**

29. *The litter licensing threshold for dog breeding should be reduced from three to two per 12-month period. A list of all licensed sellers should be publicly available, which would allow for verification and provide assurance to buyers. Care should be taken to ensure that future legislative changes to the breeding framework do not discourage groups such as families from breeding from a much-loved pet, or hinder farmers and gamekeepers from being able to produce the next generations of working dogs.*

30. *The Government should produce clearer guidance for local authority enforcers regarding Section six of LAIA regulations, which prohibit the breeding of dogs where there are reasonable expectations that their genetics or health would lead to welfare problems. This guidance should include a list of breeds for which it is unlikely that a licence would be issued, and exceptional cases in which they might.*

31. There are currently few legal safeguards to protect cats and their kittens, as cat breeding is not a licensable activity. Cat breeding should be awarded the same legislative safeguards and regulations as dog breeding under LAIA regulations.

32. There are significant welfare concerns over the ‘puppy yoga’ trend, which involves the use of underage and potentially unvaccinated puppies in a setting that may be highly detrimental to their health and wellbeing. The Department should work with sector organisations to review how these welfare concerns could be most effectively addressed—for example through introducing stronger regulations, or introducing an outright ban of this practice.

68 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

69 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

70 [Q60](#)

71 Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

4 Canine Fertility Clinics

33. Canine Fertility Clinics (CFCs) offer a range of services, which can include stud dog services, supply and shipping of semen, ultrasound scanning, whelping assistance, progesterone testing, and artificial insemination.⁷² Some fertility clinics will have in-house or consultant vets and therefore will be operating entirely legally.⁷³ Others, however, are illegally carrying out invasive procedures, classed as acts of veterinary surgery under the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966). Unlawful acts being performed by lay-persons can include intravenous blood sampling, artificial insemination, and even caesarean sections.⁷⁴

34. There has been a sharp rise in the number of CFCs, from 37 in 2020 to over 400 in April 2023.⁷⁵ The BVA reports that 93% of vets are either ‘very’ or ‘quite’ concerned about the boom in unregulated CFCs, with 30% of companion animal practice vets saying they were aware of such clinics operating in their local area.⁷⁶

35. The RSPCA states that “unregistered, unaccountable canine fertility clinics have no place in ethical, health led dog breeding”.⁷⁷ Sarah Carr, CEO, Naturewatch Foundation, further highlighted that while vets have had years of study, individuals can set themselves up as canine fertility clinics without any regulation.⁷⁸

36. There are serious ethical questions regarding the role CFCs play in facilitating and helping to normalise reproductive dysfunction in popular dog breeds.⁷⁹ Dogs unable to reproduce without human intervention may undergo artificial insemination or semen collection.⁸⁰ In particular, brachycephalic breeds are frequently unable to mate and whelp naturally, with a documented 80% caesarean rate because of their body conformation—consequently, they are often selectively bred at CFCs.⁸¹ Sarah Carr told us that “there should be a condition that if a dog cannot mate naturally, there should not be artificial insemination. It should not be allowed if they cannot mate or whelp naturally.”⁸²

Demand for ‘designer’ dogs

37. The rise in CFCs is linked to increased demand for ‘designer’ dog breeds, whose extreme characteristics have the potential to compromise health and welfare.⁸³ As the RSPCA notes, some of the dogs have such extreme features it is difficult to differentiate their anatomy (eyes, nose) from rolls of fat and wrinkles.⁸⁴ In particular, CFCs are tied to the breeding of brachycephalic dogs, including French and English bulldogs, and pug

72 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

73 [Q315](#) [David Martin]; The Kennel Club ([PWA0015](#))

74 [Q16](#) [Sarah Carr]; [Q17](#) [Dr Donald]; [Q28](#) [Sarah Carr]; RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

75 [Q15](#)

76 British Veterinary Association, [Voice of the Veterinary Profession Survey](#), 2022

77 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

78 [Q16](#)

79 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

80 Naturewatch Foundation, All-party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group (APDAWG), UK Centre for Animal Law (A-law), Hope Rescue Centre, Focus on Animal Law (FOAL), Jordan Shelley, animal welfare campaigner, Scottish SPCA, British Veterinary Association (BVA) ([PWA0056](#))

81 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

82 [Q28](#)

83 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Woodgreen Pets Charity ([PWA0019](#)); Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#)); Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECD) ([PWA0057](#))

84 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

breeds.⁸⁵ There are also clinics which openly promote the ability to breed from aggressive dogs as a benefit of using their services.⁸⁶ Describing the consequences of extreme breeding, the RSPCA highlights that, “The health and welfare of these animals is likely to be so poor that they will experience a lifetime of ill health and suffering.”⁸⁷

38. Social media, influencers and celebrities play a role in perpetuating and normalising extreme breeding trends.⁸⁸ Dr Wensley, Senior Veterinary Surgeon for Animal Welfare and Professional Engagement, PDSA, described demand for flat-faced breeds as “high and unprecedented”.⁸⁹ Dr Sam Gaines, RSPCA Head of Companion Animals, explained that, “Our big concern is that it is very much being driven by the desire for certain exaggerated conformations and certain aesthetic trends.”⁹⁰ There was support for initiatives to improve public awareness of welfare issues, and to discourage acquisition of extreme breeds.⁹¹

Regulating CFCs

39. LAIA regulations do not cover stud dogs.⁹² Unscrupulous breeders may use a stud dog multiple times, potentially one with extreme conformations or inheritable diseases.⁹³ We heard from Naturewatch that stud dog ownership needs to be regulated, as individuals are deliberately breeding from stud dogs to produce increasingly extreme physical traits.⁹⁴

40. The maximum penalty for breaches of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) is just £100. The BVA describes this as “an inadequate deterrent”,⁹⁵ while Sarah Carr told us that “There is no incentive not to do it if you think of a clinic that is performing caesarean sections and how much money it could be bringing in.”⁹⁶ We note that far more stringent financial penalties already exist for certain other offences relating to animals, with the Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022 introducing a system of financial penalties of up to £5,000.⁹⁷

41. There was widespread agreement that the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) (VSA) should be reformed to include CFCs.⁹⁸ Dr Melissa Donald, Council Member, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), told us that the RCVS “definitely would like a new Veterinary Surgeons Act that is appropriate for the 21st century, which includes access to premises, not necessarily just through the veterinary surgeon, through the owners who actually own it.”⁹⁹ As Naturewatch and the BVA highlight, unscrupulous CFCs have benefitted from diffuse regulatory and enforcement arrangements and lack of clarity over

85 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

86 Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#))

87 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

88 [Q174](#) [Dr Ravetz; Alexandra Baker]; Pets at Home ([PWA0044](#))

89 [Q28](#)

90 [Q103](#)

91 [Q24](#) [Dr Wensley]; [Q110](#) [Dr Gaines]

92 [Q25](#) [Sarah Carr]

93 [Q25](#) [Sarah Carr]; [Q156](#) [Dr Ravetz]

94 [Q26](#) [Sarah Carr]

95 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

96 [Q26](#)

97 Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022, [section 3](#)

98 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#)); RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)); Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) ([PWA0031](#)); Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

99 [Q19](#)

which statutory body holds responsibility for enforcement under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.¹⁰⁰ The BVA reports that over three-quarters (78%) of vets were not aware of the mechanisms for reporting such clinics, with just one in five vets saying they were aware.¹⁰¹

42. We questioned Minister Benyon on what steps Government is taking to tackle unregulated CFCs. The Minister was supportive of reforming or replacing the Act, and told us that “If we do get into reforming this Act, there will be a very detailed debate that will require people with real knowledge in both Houses to ensure that we are getting this right.”¹⁰²

43. **The rise in Canine Fertility Clinics, from 37 in 2020 to over 400 in 2023, is of significant concern. Many are likely being operated without veterinary involvement, with invasive procedures classed as acts of veterinary surgery being performed unlawfully by lay-persons, to the detriment of the animals involved. Unscrupulous Canine Fertility Clinics have benefitted from diffuse enforcement arrangements, lack of clarity over which statutory body is responsible for enforcement under the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966), and uncertainty as to where concerns around suspected illegal activity should be reported.**

44. *The Government should introduce a new Veterinary Surgeons Act to update that of 1966. This should include the regulation of Canine Fertility Clinics. The Department should work with local authorities and relevant sector bodies to draft and publish guidance covering the training and knowledge that would be required for local authority enforcers to effectively regulate Canine Fertility Clinics.*

45. *The current £100 fine on summary conviction for performing acts of veterinary surgery illegally is a derisory deterrent and is well below the cost of most, if not all, veterinary procedures. The Government should bring the fine for individuals illegally performing acts of veterinary surgery in line with the financial penalties under The Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022. Alongside this, the Government should issue guidance setting out which enforcement body members of the public and veterinary professionals should report concerns to about suspected illegal veterinary surgery.*

46. *The Government should work with the sector to formulate and introduce a public information campaign to raise awareness around welfare issues and harms of so-called ‘designer’ pets, particularly brachycephalic breeds, with the aim of discouraging acquisition of these breeds.*

47. *Stud dogs should be brought within Licensing of Activities Involving Animals regulations. The inclusion of stud dogs would help give traceability and ensure welfare measures apply to male dogs kept for breeding, who otherwise fall outside the scope of the regulations.*

100 Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#)); British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

101 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

102 [Q354](#)

5 Abuse and Mutilation

48. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 prohibits the carrying out of non-exempt mutilations, such as the declawing of cats or the cropping of a dog's ears for aesthetic purposes.¹⁰³ In 2021, the Government launched an as yet unpublished consultation which included proposals to ban the commercial and non-commercial movement into Great Britain of dogs which have been subjected to practices such as ear cropping or tail docking. Dr Wensley, Senior Veterinary Surgeon for Animal Welfare and Professional Engagement, PDSA, described these acts of mutilation as:

procedures that are painful and have other welfare implications beyond pain, such as communication for the animal, for those to be undertaken purely for human self-interest, human gain, human vanity, is ethically abhorrent and should not be tolerated at all within the UK.¹⁰⁴

Ear cropping

49. The RSPCA describes ear cropping an unnecessary surgical procedure in which a dog's ears are removed or altered. It is generally performed on puppies between six and 12 weeks old.¹⁰⁵ Dr Gaines, RSPCA's Head of Companion Animals, told us that:

We have seen a huge rise in the number of reports of dogs with cropped ears coming through to us. There was a 621% difference from 2015 to 2020. We see huge impacts on these dogs in terms of short-term pain responses, but in some cases it can be for extended periods.¹⁰⁶

50. Witnesses told us they were seeing an increase in dogs with cropped ears.¹⁰⁷ Around 3% of dog owners who got their dog from abroad said that they obtained it from abroad because they wanted the dog to have cropped ears.¹⁰⁸ Dr Wensley told us that equates to an estimated 29,000 dogs now in the UK with cropped ears.¹⁰⁹ IVC Evidensia notes 62% of vets in reported seeing more cases of ear cropping since the pandemic.¹¹⁰ The RSPCA recorded its highest number of complaints relating to the cropping of dogs' ears in 2021 since records began in 2015, highlighting that in the last year alone, there has been an 86% increase in reports of ear cropping.¹¹¹

51. Witnesses highlighted the need to raise public awareness about the harms of ear cropping.¹¹² Dr Shotton told us that "there is just a lack of information. Some people just

103 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

104 [Q37](#)

105 RSPCA, [Dog ear cropping](#), n.d.

106 [Q112](#)

107 [Q7](#) [Dr Shotton]; [Q186](#) [Dr Ravetz]; Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, Wyre Forest District Council ([PWA0004](#))

108 PDSA ([PWA0050](#))

109 [Q31](#)

110 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

111 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

112 [Q22](#); [Q185](#)

genuinely think that a dog looks that way”.¹¹³ IVC Evidensia have called for an outright ban on owning dogs with cropped ears, subject to certain safeguards being put in place to allow licensing of those already cropped.¹¹⁴

52. The rise in demand may be due in part to celebrities and influencers sharing images of their ear-cropped dogs (see also page 23).¹¹⁵ There is a current trend for Bull breed dog ownership, these dogs commonly having their ears cropped to increase their aggressive appearance.¹¹⁶ As Nicola Hirst, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Director for Service Delivery, told us:

There is a direct correlation between popularity of certain celebrities who have some of these animals who make it popular. There is something about public education, about the impact of this on the animal, so that we can try to deter people from bringing them through.¹¹⁷

53. There is evidence that ear cropping of dogs is being carried out illegally in the UK and that kits advertised for the specific use of ear cropping have been available for sale online in the UK.¹¹⁸ We note that these kits are all too easy to find, and as Dr Justine Shotton warned:

Wherever we have found those kits online we have flagged it to the retailer and they have taken them down, but then they will just crop up—excuse the pun—down the line. It is very hard to keep on top of it.¹¹⁹

54. Dr Boyden told us that there should be a ban on the sale of ear cropping kits.¹²⁰ When we questioned the Minister on steps the Government could take to restrict purchase of these kits, he told us “There must be a way of doing that without it being a heavy-handed primary legislative route, but there may well be, and it is something we will certainly look at.”¹²¹

Tail docking

55. Tail docking is the removal of a dog’s tail in part or whole for cosmetic reasons or to prevent possible injury. Tail docking is prohibited unless it is carried out in line with the Docking of Working Dogs’ Tails (England) Regulations 2007, which set out which working dogs are exempt from the ban.¹²² However, the British Veterinary Association describes it as “an outdated practice that involves cutting or crushing muscle, nerves, and bone without anaesthetic in puppies under 5 days old.”¹²³ The RSPCA states that it “does not believe that the current ban on tail docking in dogs is as effective as it could be given the exemption provided for working dogs”, further suggesting that “There is insufficient evidence to support the continuation of tail docking to prevent injury in working dogs.”¹²⁴

113 [Q36](#)

114 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

115 Woodgreen Pets Charity ([PWA0019](#)); British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

116 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

117 [Q245](#)

118 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

119 [Q38](#)

120 [Q82](#)

121 [Q377](#)

122 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

123 British Veterinary Association, [Tail docking in dogs](#), n.d.

124 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

Cat declawing

56. PDSA's 2022 PAW Report warns that 5% of cat owners who got their cat from abroad—equating to around 31,000 cats—chose to acquire from abroad because they wanted a declawed cat.¹²⁵ Dr Roberts, Director of Feline Welfare at the Cats Protection Society, told us that:

[...] it is not trimming their nails. It is amputating the end of the digit; it is the equivalent of taking your fingers off like that. It leaves the cats with chronic pain, but also with severe behavioural issues. They need their claws. It means they cannot express that natural behaviour.¹²⁶

The import of animals with mutilations

57. While the Animal Welfare Act 2006 prohibits the carrying out of these mutilations, the import and sale of dogs with cropped ears or docked tails, as well as declawed cats, is not prohibited. Nor is a specific offence to send dogs abroad for ear cropping.¹²⁷ Written submissions described the ban on ear cropping of dogs for cosmetic purposes as “ineffective” and “severely limited” due to the loophole that makes it legal to import such dogs, with strong sector support for closing this loophole.¹²⁸ Dr Ravetz described the loophole as “abhorrent”, further explaining:

We are definitely picking up through our practices more animals coming in with cropped ears. Nobody will admit they have been done in this country, and while there is the loophole that they can be imported, it is a smokescreen for them also potentially being done in this country, because nobody will admit to illegally doing that.¹²⁹

58. As APHA Chief Executive David Holdsworth told us:

[...] it is not illegal to bring a cropped animal in or out of the UK. It is the practice within the UK that is illegal. That makes it very difficult for us because at the border there is no requirement for us to check. It is not illegal. We will not have the data around that because it is not a legal requirement.¹³⁰

When we questioned the Minister on the importation loophole, he said:

we do not have evidence for the overall number of cropped dogs entering Great Britain, but we do have statistics for cases where a cropped or docked dog has been detained due to being illegally landed. It was 115 in 2021; in 2022 it was 29; and so far, up to the end of last month, 21 this year.¹³¹

59. Many imported dogs with cropped ears appear to be imported on pet passports originating from Romania and Bulgaria, although it is illegal to crop ears in both of these

125 PDSA, [Animal Wellbeing Report 2022](#), 2022

126 [Q70](#)

127 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

128 Woodgreen Pets Charity ([PWA0019](#)); Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); PDSA ([PWA0050](#)); Pet Industry Federation ([PWA0053](#)); see also, [Q37](#) [Dr Shotton]; [Q186](#) [Dr Ravetz]

129 [Q186](#)

130 [Q245](#)

131 [Q372](#) [The Minister provided evidence on 28 November 2023]

countries. IVC Evidensia suggests that a significant proportion of these dogs may actually from Serbia, where there is endemic rabies.¹³² Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs at the time of our inquiry, told us that “there is no data available on the source country of mutilated pets currently coming to GB.”¹³³

60. *Ear cropping, cosmetic tail docking and cat declawing are ethically abhorrent procedures which are likely to have lasting welfare implications for the animals involved. The Government must give priority to closing the loophole that enables the importation of mutilated animals. This legislation should be introduced as a matter of urgency, and certainly before the end of the current Parliament.*

61. *It is all too easy to purchase DIY ear cropping kits online. This allows unscrupulous individuals to carry out this act of mutilation. Alongside closing the importation loophole, the Government should legislate to restrict the possession, hosting, sale and supply of DIY ear cropping kits.*

132 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

133 [Q378](#)

6 Monitoring and enforcement

62. Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) (LAIA) Regulations 2018, licences for dog breeding are issued by local authorities and must include conditions which protect breeding dogs and their litters from pain, suffering, injury, and disease. All commercial businesses selling animals as pets require a licence.¹³⁴ Statutory guidance on animal activities licensing for local authorities is issued by Defra.¹³⁵

63. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to animals.¹³⁶ In 2021, the maximum penalty under the Act increased from a six-month sentence and/or an unlimited fine to a maximum sentence of five years.¹³⁷ The RSPCA currently undertakes 85% of investigations and prosecutions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, with police and local authorities undertaking the remaining 15%.¹³⁸ The RSPCA states that the Act has assisted in tackling crimes associated with severe animal welfare offences due to the increased sentencing deterrent.¹³⁹

Local authority funding and enforcement

64. Central government funding for local authorities fell in real terms by over 50% between 2010–11 and 2020–21.¹⁴⁰ The financial situation faced by local authorities is affecting their ability to undertake activities including inspections, kennelling, investigations and enforcement.¹⁴¹ Blue Cross describes the current financial climate as “challenging with significant pressures on levels of public expenditure”, further stating that if enforcers cannot meet the statutory duties, “the risk is that the law itself will fall into disrepute and perpetrators will become emboldened to ignore regulations.”¹⁴² The British Veterinary Association notes that effective enforcement requires a multi-agency approach, but warns that police and local authorities are prioritising other activities over animal welfare related breaches due to a lack of resources.¹⁴³

65. The sector warned of a lack of regulatory enforcement arising from insufficient resources and expertise, and a varying approach between local authorities.¹⁴⁴ Just over half (53%) of local authorities in England have at least one animal welfare officer, three in five (60%) upper-tier authorities, and just under half (48%) lower-tier authorities have no dedicated animal welfare officers.¹⁴⁵

66. Organisations told us of a non-standardised and inconsistent approach to licensing and enforcement, which places animal welfare at risk.¹⁴⁶ Dogs Trust expresses “serious

134 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

135 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, [Animal activities licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities](#), October 2023

136 Animal Welfare Act 2006, [section 4](#); House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Sentencing\) Bill](#), March 2021

137 Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021, [section 1](#); House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Sentencing\) Bill](#), March 2021; RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

138 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

139 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

140 House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Sentencing\) Bill](#), March 2021

141 Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation ([PWA0026](#))

142 Blue Cross ([PWA0043](#))

143 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

144 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

145 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

146 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

concerns” around inspections of animal establishments being conducted by officials with limited resources and little knowledge of animal welfare. There may be particular gaps in officers’ understanding of equine welfare issues.¹⁴⁷ Blue Cross emphasises that enforcement is:

severely constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge, both of animal welfare and the legislative framework; a dearth of continuous training and development; inadequate and variable resources; and inconsistent data collection and analysis.¹⁴⁸

As Dr Boyden told us, “inspectors could literally be licensing a taxi in the morning and a breeding establishment in the afternoon.”¹⁴⁹

67. Practical barriers to enforcement action include the cost of caring for seized animals, as well as kennelling capacity not keeping pace with the number of dogs seized by local authorities.¹⁵⁰ Hope Rescue described “huge issues for local authorities, who are struggling to execute warrants as there is nowhere for the dogs to go”, further warning that this could lead to dogs suffering as they cannot be removed.¹⁵¹

68. Pip Griffin, Senior Dog Warden, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), told us that, at the time of our oral evidence session in September 2023, WRS had 2,000 stray dogs that had been picked up and not been claimed. She said:

We are now at a precipice where we have no kennels. Our kennels are all full [...] At the moment, we have so many dogs in pounds that desperately need to get sorted. So many councils are having to put dogs to sleep.¹⁵²

Highlighting the financial costs involved in enforcement actions, she added that there is a domino effect because the councils do not have enough money.¹⁵³ She further stated:

A raid was done [...] two weeks ago. There were 86 dogs. The bill just for kennelling for one month is £68,000 for that local authority. That is not including going to court, applying for a section 20, all the people on the ground on that day, the vets and following on with the veterinary fees for those animals, the grooming and everything else that has been involved in that particular case.¹⁵⁴

69. Wales was cited by Dr Boyden as an example of good practice in terms of improving training and consistency standards of local authority animal welfare officers.¹⁵⁵ Since 2021, Wales has implemented a 5-year animal welfare plan, one strand of which aims to improve the qualifications, training and expertise of its local authority officers. It has trained a team of regional enforcement officers, and senior intelligence officers, creating a greater level of expertise to support local authorities with more complex cases.¹⁵⁶ The All-Party

147 World Horse Welfare ([PWA0047](#))

148 Blue Cross ([PWA0043](#))

149 [Q59](#)

150 [Q42](#) [Sarah Carr]; Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#))

151 Hope Rescue ([PWA0041](#))

152 [Qq92–93](#)

153 [Q92](#)

154 [Q101](#)

155 [Q59](#), see also, Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

156 The Welsh Government ([PWA0028](#))

Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) made a similar recommendation for England, suggesting that there should be a requirement for local authorities to have access to a dedicated animal welfare officer, alongside the establishment of regional forums to share resources, information and intelligence.¹⁵⁷

70. The financial situation faced by local authorities is affecting their ability to undertake activities including inspections, kennelling, investigations and enforcement. At the same time, the number of dogs from low welfare or illegal breeding establishments seized via local authority enforcement activities is resulting in capacity issues. Some local authorities struggle to execute warrants as there are insufficient kennel spaces for seized dogs. Sadly, some local authorities are being forced to put dogs to sleep because of lack of capacity and funding.

71. Animal welfare legislation must be consistently and robustly enforced if it is to achieve its statutory objectives and act as a deterrent to unscrupulous breeders seeking to circumvent the law. Local authorities play a vital role in the licensing and enforcement activities that protect animal welfare. The ability of local authorities to perform key regulatory activities is constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training, and inadequate funding and resourcing. This results in an inconsistent approach nationally, and a postcode lottery in terms of levels of understanding and prioritisation of animal welfare issues. If enforcers are unable to meet their statutory duties under LAIA regulations, perpetrators may become emboldened to flout them.

72. A more consistent approach to training and accreditation for animal welfare officers is needed. Existing variations in training and enforcement puts animal welfare at risk. A central unit of suitably trained inspectors should be established which can be utilised by local authorities to improve collaboration and disseminate best practice. Wales has implemented a 5-year animal welfare plan which includes a focus on sharing and developing local authority knowledge and training. The Department should work with counterparts in Welsh Government, and the sector, to assess how similar measures could successfully be embedded in England.

73. The Department should work with local authorities to assess the adequacy of existing kennel space capacity for seized dogs and implement measures to increase capacity if needed.

¹⁵⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, [Improving the Effectiveness of Animal Welfare Enforcement](#), 2022

7 Pet importation—incidence and smuggling

74. Dogs, cats, and ferrets can legally enter Great Britain in one of two ways—under the non-commercial pet travel rules or via the commercial importation regime. Each regime has different rules and requirements.¹⁵⁸ In 2022, 282,909 dogs were imported under the pet travel scheme, and 41,151 dogs were imported under the commercial regime.¹⁵⁹ In 2022, there were 34,291 non-commercial cat entries,¹⁶⁰ and 7,312 commercial cat imports.¹⁶¹ Defra’s written evidence does not provide figures on ferret imports but notes that no ferrets were detained for non-compliance at Dover between 2020–2022.¹⁶²

75. The withdrawn Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill proposed a number of measures that would have helped safeguard pet welfare by limiting the numbers of dogs, cats and ferrets that can be imported on a non-commercial basis; and setting restrictions on the condition of animals that can be brought into the country. Specifically, the Bill set out a reduction in the number of animals that could travel in a car across the border to a maximum of five animals per vehicle on ferry and rail routes, and three per person for foot passengers or air travellers. It also proposed restrictions on animals which were below a certain age, had been mutilated, or were past a certain stage of gestation.¹⁶³

76. In August 2021, the Government launched a consultation on banning the import of puppies under the age of six months, reducing the maximum stage of pregnancy beyond which a dog cannot be imported, and banning the import of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails.¹⁶⁴ In a response to a Parliamentary written question, the Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries stated that Defra is “carefully reviewing” feedback from stakeholder engagement and would publish a summary “in due course”.¹⁶⁵

77. The Canine and Feline Sector Group and the Dogs Trust have suggested that the proposal in the withdrawn Bill that a maximum of five pets per vehicle could be imported under pet travel rules should be reduced to three.¹⁶⁶ Dogs Trust notes that this recommendation is in line with data from its National Dog Survey (2021), which estimates that 97.7% of dog owners have three or fewer dogs, explaining it would support an exception for people who are relocating.¹⁶⁷

Pet smuggling

78. There is a criminal element to puppy smuggling as it is perceived as a low risk, high reward crime, with the potential for sizeable profitmaking. A puppy worth €40

158 UK Government, [Bringing your pet dog, cat or ferret to Great Britain](#), n.d.; Individuals bringing pets into the country under the commercial importation regime must follow Balai rules, which include regulations around microchipping, rabies vaccinations and tapeworm treatment. See also, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, [Import live animals and germinal products to Great Britain under Balai rules](#), n.d.

159 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

160 PQ 136868 [[Pet Travel Scheme: Cats](#)], 31 January 2023

161 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

162 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

163 House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Kept Animals Bill\)](#), 29 November 2022

164 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

165 PQ 9279 [[Dogs: Smuggling](#)], 11 January 2024

166 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

167 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

in Romania can sell for €700 in the UK; a single dealer prosecuted by the RSPCA was earning £3 million annually.¹⁶⁸ Dogs Trust stated that “Current sentencing and penalties are no deterrent for importers”, adding that “illegal trade has been able to thrive due to the ineffective and insufficient border controls and enforcement.”¹⁶⁹

Outlining the insufficiency of existing penalties, Dr Boyden told us:

If you are caught smuggling cigarettes, you could get up to seven years’ imprisonment and you would not get your cigarettes back. The maximum imprisonment for illegal importation is 12 months.¹⁷⁰

79. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home describes the current regime as “a target for criminals to abuse”, noting that it is not possible to identify the level of illegally imported animals because smugglers who successfully take advantages of loopholes will never be identified.¹⁷¹ John Keefe, Chief Corporate and Public Affairs Officer, Getlink Group (Eurotunnel), told us that from the perspective of carriers, “It is very difficult to pick up planned smuggling. We operate a system for animal health and importation for compliant pet owners.”¹⁷²

80. There is evidence of pets being imported under the wrong regime.¹⁷³ David Holdsworth, Chief Executive, APHA, told us that, “Headline data are that there perhaps is some movement between the schemes, which should not happen, and perhaps there has been a route [for smuggling] there.”¹⁷⁴ Nicola Hirst, Director for Service Delivery, APHA, told us that between January and November 2023, out of 6,195 animals detained for non-compliance at the border, there were 146 commercial consignments that were disguised as travelling under the pet scheme.¹⁷⁵

Import of heavily pregnant animals

81. It is currently legal to import pregnant dogs up to 90% of their gestation period. Dogs Trust and the Canine and Feline Sector Group call for a ban on the non-commercial transport of pregnant dogs in the last 30% (more than 42 days pregnant), and a complete ban on the commercial movement of pregnant dogs.¹⁷⁶ Dr Boyden warned of a “significant increase in heavily pregnant mums being imported to basically whelp in the UK and then those puppies be sold off as UK-bred.”¹⁷⁷

82. Dr Roberts outlined the need for a ban on importation of cats under six months and on heavily pregnant cats¹⁷⁸, further highlighting that, “With the original Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill they were not going to include cats in the ban”, emphasising the need for any

168 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))

169 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

170 [Q68](#)

171 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

172 [Q234](#)

173 [Q216](#)

174 [Q248](#)

175 [Q248](#)

176 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)). Dogs are pregnant for approximately 63 days, or nine weeks - see PDSA, [Pregnancy in dogs](#), n.d.

177 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

178 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#)); [Q69](#) [Dr Roberts]

extension of animal welfare legislation to include cats.¹⁷⁹ As Cats Protection warned, “If these rules are not equally applied to cats, there is risk that those exploiting animals for a quick buck will simply switch their focus from puppies to cats and kittens.”¹⁸⁰

83. On 15 March 2024, the Government announced its support for the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill, a Private Members’ bill introduced by Selaine Saxby MP.¹⁸¹ The legislation aims to close existing loopholes exploited by unscrupulous breeders and traders to illegally smuggle cats and dogs into the UK. It also intends to strengthen the Pet Travel Scheme to ensure that no one is able to fraudulently import animals for sale under the guise of being an owner travelling with their own pets. This includes reducing the number of animals that can travel into Great Britain under this scheme from five per person to five per vehicle, or three per foot or air passenger as well as ensuring that pet movements take place within five days of the owner’s travel. The Bill will allow for the introduction of further legislation to raise the minimum age for importing a puppy or a kitten from 15 weeks to six months, allowing them to grow up ahead of being taken on potentially long and stressful journeys which can have a lasting impact on their temperament and behaviour. Secondary legislation under the Bill also allows for the ban on imports of heavily pregnant dogs and cats or animals with cropped ears, docked tails or that have been declawed.

84. **The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill proposed a series of measures including a ban on the import of young puppies and heavily pregnant dogs. These would significantly enhance protections for pets, and there is considerable sector and public support for bringing them forward. It is welcome that the Government is supporting upcoming Private Members’ bills on areas including the import of dogs, cats and ferrets. We support these bills and encourage the Government to facilitate their passage through both Houses as quickly as possible.**

85. *As soon as possible, and certainly by the end of the current Parliament, the Government must ensure the following measures are implemented:*

- *A limit on the number of dogs, cats and ferrets that can be imported by an individual into the UK from five per person to five per vehicle, and three per foot or air passenger.*
- *A ban on the importation of puppies and kittens under six months.*
- *A ban on the importation of pregnant dogs and cats in the last 30% of gestation.*

179 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#)); Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0070](#))

180 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

181 Selaine Saxby was appointed to the Committee on 22 January 2024.

8 Biosecurity and pre-import health checks

86. There are a number of biosecurity risks associated with imported pets, particularly those which have been illegally landed. These include zoonotic diseases that can pose a risk to the public, including rabies, leishmaniasis and *Brucella canis*.¹⁸² Imported dogs are also at increased risk of infectious diseases such as Canine parvovirus as a result of low welfare breeding conditions, and being kept in cramped and dirty conditions whilst in transit.¹⁸³

87. Of particular concern is the increase in cases of *Brucella canis*, a non-endemic zoonotic disease. Cases have risen from 14 cases in 2020 to 75 in 2022.¹⁸⁴ This rise is likely due to increasing numbers of infected imported dogs.¹⁸⁵ The first reported case of dog-to-human transmission in the UK occurred in 2022, with the owner catching it from her imported Belarusian rescue dog.¹⁸⁶ It is difficult to cure an infected dog, and recurrence is common.¹⁸⁷

88. The changing distribution of tick species across Europe has been linked to increased pet travel and dog importation.¹⁸⁸ Sector organisations including the British Veterinary Association have highlighted the need for the reintroduction of compulsory tick treatments for all non-commercial movements of cats and dogs, and the introduction of compulsory *Echinococcus multilocularis* tapeworm treatment for cats as well as dogs.¹⁸⁹ The sector has also called for the shortening of the tapeworm treatment window from 24–120 to 24–48 hours before entry into the UK from infected countries.¹⁹⁰

89. All dogs, cats and ferrets must be vaccinated against rabies before they can enter Great Britain. The Department's evidence states that "strict animal health requirements in relation to rabies apply to the movement of all dogs and cats—including rescue animals—into Great Britain."¹⁹¹ However, there is considerable sector concern over the rabies vaccination status of imported dogs,¹⁹² as some dogs are being imported with falsified vaccination records.¹⁹³ Four Paws notes that young puppies illegally imported from Eastern Europe "often have false vaccination stamps" that indicate that the rabies vaccine has been

182 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)), Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, Wyre Forest District Council ([PWA0004](#))

183 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

184 PQ 171386 [[Dogs: Brucellosis](#)], 22 March 2023; PQ 180115 [[Brucellosis: Dogs](#)], 14 April 2023

185 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))

186 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#)); RSPCA ([PWA0018](#)). The foster owner was hospitalised, and her pet dogs had to be euthanised.

187 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

188 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

189 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#)); see also, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

190 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#)); Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

191 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

192 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

193 Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, Wyre Forest District Council ([PWA0004](#)); FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#)); IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

administered, where in fact the puppy is under the 12-week age minimum required to receive the vaccine.¹⁹⁴ Dogs Trust warns of instances of puppies being administered half doses of the vaccine, which will not confer adequate protection.¹⁹⁵

90. The scale of the problem of puppies arriving in Great Britain with falsified vaccination records is unclear given that successful illegal importation occurs under the radar. Nicola Hirst, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Director for Service Delivery, told us that between January and November 2023, 6,195 animals were detained because of non-compliance at the border. Of these, 125 were detained under the rabies order, meaning that their rabies vaccinations were not correct.¹⁹⁶

91. A further concern is that the rabies vaccination is not effective for an already infected animal, and that the three-week period is insufficient time for an infected animal to display symptoms.¹⁹⁷ Few veterinarians in the UK may have ever encountered a clinical case of rabies, making it unclear whether an early case would be rapidly identified, particularly given that initial symptoms are non-specific.¹⁹⁸

92. There is considerable sector support for the introduction of the rabies blood (titre) test, as well as increasing the post-vaccination wait period for rabies from three to 12 weeks so that puppies and kittens cannot be imported at under the age of six months.¹⁹⁹ This could have the added advantage of reducing smuggling, as puppies are less sought after at this age.²⁰⁰

93. **The movement of illegally imported dogs into the UK, and the importation of stray dogs for rehoming, pose considerable biosecurity risks for both pets and humans. Diseases such as rabies, leishmaniasis and *Brucella canis* may be imported into the UK from abroad. Of particular concern is the rise in *Brucella canis* cases in the UK, from 14 in 2020 to 75 in 2022. Imported dogs are also at increased risk of infectious diseases such as parvovirus as a result of low welfare breeding establishments, and cramped and dirty conditions whilst in transit.**

94. *The Government should mandate pre-import screening measures to control and restrict the movement of dogs from countries which have endemic diseases, such as *Brucella canis* and leishmaniasis, that are not present in the UK. Accordingly, all imported dogs from these countries should be tested for relevant non-endemic diseases.*

95. *The Government should introduce a requirement for a rabies blood (titre) test by a veterinary professional before a dog enters the UK. The post-rabies vaccination waiting period should be increased from three to 12 weeks. This would help mitigate the risk of rabies entering the country via imported dogs, as well as ensuring that puppies and kittens cannot be imported under the age of six months. This would have the added advantage of tackling puppy smuggling.*

194 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#)); IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

195 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))

196 [Q248](#)

197 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

198 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))

199 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#)); [Q32](#) [Dr Shotton]; [Q87](#) [Dr Boyden]

200 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))

96. *The Government should shorten the tapeworm treatment window from 24–120 hours to 24–48 hours; introduce mandatory tapeworm treatment for imported cats as well as dogs; and reintroduce compulsory tick treatments for all non-commercial movements of cats and dogs.*

9 Pet importation—responsibility, monitoring and enforcement

The role of carriers and the checking process

97. It is the responsibility of carriers, meaning ferry operators and Eurotunnel, to check pets at their port of departure outside Great Britain. For pets arriving via air routes, checks are carried out upon arrival by authorised pet checkers.²⁰¹

98. All non-commercial imports of dogs and cats undergo 100% documentary and identity checks by authorised pet checkers.²⁰² Commercial imports undergo 100% remote documentary checks and risk-based physical checks.²⁰³ There is no requirement for the carrier to ‘visualise’ the animal.²⁰⁴ John Keefe of Getlink Group (Eurotunnel) told us, “Our staff are not veterinary experts. They are not veterinary trained. Their job is to check paperwork and identify the animal by the chip to the paperwork that is being carried.”²⁰⁵

99. Organisations including Cats Protection, the Canine and Feline Sector Group, and Dogs Trust were emphatic about the need to introduce visual checks, with Dogs Trust highlighting that it is “desperately concerned” that any new anti-smuggling measures would be unenforceable without visual checks.²⁰⁶

100. Dr Boyden told us that Dogs Trust had been able to successfully import a stuffed toy dog due to lack of adequate checks.²⁰⁷ She further outlined:

At the moment we are told that there are 100% checks at the border, and these are what are described as document and identity checks. What that means is that, if you are bringing your dog into the country, you would be handed a microchip scanner. You would scan your own pet, and you would hand the scanner back with your passport for the operative to check it and check all the details. There is no requirement for the operative to visualise your pet. If you are not looking at them, how can you see if they are pregnant, if they are underage, if they are mutilated?²⁰⁸

101. We asked Lord Benyon whether the Department shares sector concerns about the robustness of a system based on 100% checks. He said that “we can do physical checks as well, and we do. We will work on a risk-based, intelligence-led system where we can.”²⁰⁹

102. Dogs Trust suggests that responsibility for pet travel checks should be moved from carriers to a qualified government agency animal professional, alongside a requirement

201 Animal and Plant Health Agency, [Pet travel: checks on pets by transport carriers](#), May 2022

202 ‘Documentary and identity checks’ means the pets papers and microchip are checked. See: Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

203 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))

204 [Q68](#) [Dr Boyden]

205 [Q215](#)

206 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#)); Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))

207 [Q68](#)

208 [Q68](#)

209 [Q394](#)

for sufficient out-of-hours and weekend cover at ports.²¹⁰ Tim Reardon, Head of EU Exit and Company Secretary, Port of Dover, said that, “we do not have a view on it”, further outlining:

The critical thing from a port operations perspective is that whoever does the checks should do them in a place and in a way that is consistent with the vehicle moving through without interruption, and specifically without interruption to other vehicles following them.²¹¹

103. We questioned Lord Benyon on whether carriers are striking the right balance between speed, checks, profit and identifying non-compliance. He said:

It is entirely justified that they should be working in close association with the Animal and Plant Health Agency and Border Force. [...] We want to make sure that we are identifying risks and using all players to help us in this, and carriers are important.²¹²

104. Where carriers identify potential issues, these are passed on as intelligence to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).²¹³ Steve Lawrie explained the circumstances under which a vehicle might be flagged for additional audit:

[...] I get a manifest with every pet that is on that vessel. I will scan through on an ad hoc basis, just to see if there are multiple pets travelling under one vehicle. Then, if it spikes an interest, I will check on the registration number to see how often that vehicle has travelled and whether it has been carrying the same pets.²¹⁴

Animal and Plant Health Agency resourcing

105. APHA has a vital role to play in protecting human and animal populations against biosecurity risks and prevention of diseases entering the country. On an average day in 2023, 12 APHA staff were based at the Port of Dover working across two shifts. They cover weekends, bank holidays and nights by on-call duty, responding to referrals from carriers or UK Border Force.²¹⁵

106. We asked APHA whether staffing levels are adequate to intercept smugglers and other unscrupulous importers. David Holdsworth told us that that all of its animal health officers could be deployed across Great Britain if needed.²¹⁶ Nicola Hirst said:

we flex our resource. Sometimes we will operate on a Saturday or a Saturday night because we are trying to surprise the people who are coming through. They do not expect us to be there at different times. We will do that in order to try to break some of the cycles.²¹⁷

210 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#)); see also, Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))

211 [Q237](#)

212 [Q390](#)

213 [Q215](#) [John Keefe]; [Q224](#) [Steve Lawrie]

214 [Q223](#)

215 PQ 186537 [[Animal and Plant Health Agency: Port of Dover](#)], 23 May 2023

216 [Q274](#)

217 [Q275](#)

The movement of equines

107. Several requirements govern the movement of equines from Great Britain to the European Union or Northern Ireland. These include obtaining an export health certificate (ECH), disease testing, meeting isolation and residency requirements, and pre-notifying the relevant Border Control Post (BCP).²¹⁸

108. While no equine has been officially declared in recent years as being exported for slaughter, World Horse Welfare notes that, “there is good reason to believe that equines are being moved on fraudulent passports and some of these will end up in European slaughterhouses.”²¹⁹ Jessica Stark, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, World Horse Welfare, told us that while individuals can apply for documentation from the APHA, there are no checks that those journeys are happening relating to what is being declared.²²⁰ She described the trade in horses as “very low risk and high reward”, noting that horses can be sold for meat or riding,²²¹ and that this trade can be a cover for organised crime.²²² She further said:

[...] we do know that British horses end up in European slaughterhouses. The reason is that there is an under-the-radar trade [...] as many as 44,000 horses per year could be moved, just through the west side ports. We think that just as many could be moved through the southern and eastern ports. There is huge traffic between the UK and Ireland that is not reflected in any statistics.²²³

109. In November 2023, the Government announced it would introduce measures on livestock exports, making it an offence to export live livestock including horses for fattening and slaughter.²²⁴ The Bill is currently at the Report stage in the House of Lords.²²⁵ World Horse Welfare welcomed the proposed ban, but highlighted the need for stronger control measures,²²⁶ given that the highest risk movements occur ‘under the radar’, and those involved in will find ways to avoid checks—for example by declaring vehicles empty or entering the EU via a port that is not a BCP.²²⁷

110. There are also key biosecurity risks associated with the import of equines under the current regime.²²⁸ Jessica Stark explained to us that “one of our hugest wishes is for a robust equine identification system, because you need full traceability”.²²⁹ The introduction of a digital identification system is a measure that a previous EFRA Committee called for,²³⁰ and a Government response to a public consultation set out proposals to increase digitisation of the current horse passport system.²³¹

218 Animal Plant and Health Agency, [Export horses and ponies: special rules](#), July 2022

219 World Horse Welfare ([PWA0047](#))

220 [Q72](#)

221 [Q72](#)

222 [Q76](#)

223 [Q72](#)

224 House of Commons Library, [Animal Welfare \(Live Exports\) Bill 2023–24](#), January 2024

225 UK Parliament, [Animal Welfare \(Livestock Exports\) Bill](#), February 2024

226 [Q87](#)

227 World Horse Welfare ([PWA0047](#))

228 [Q72](#)

229 [Q72](#)

230 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2021–22, [Moving animals across borders](#), HC 79

231 PQ 198021 [[Horse Passports](#)], 6 September 2023

111. Carriers play a key role in the pet importation and checking process. It is likely that there is a conflict of interest inherent in the requirement for carriers to conduct checks on their customers' pets. It is not evident that carriers are striking the right balance between speed, checks, profit and identifying non-compliance. We also have strong reservations that checking manifests on an ad hoc basis is an appropriate measure for a rigorous system. We have concerns about the robustness of a pet importation system that is based on 100% documentary checks at ports.

112. *Responsibility for border pet checks should be moved from carriers to qualified Government agency professionals. This should include a requirement for permanent 24/7 staffing cover at ports of entry.*

113. We welcome the introduction of new legislation to ban the export of live animals, including cattle, sheep and horses, for slaughter and fattening. There is a low risk and high reward element to the equine trade, with unscrupulous individuals taking advantage of lax border controls to move equines on fraudulent passports. Some of these horses will be sold for meat to European slaughterhouses.

114. *Alongside the ongoing Animal Welfare (Live Exports) Bill, stronger control measures are needed to prevent the trafficking of horses for slaughter. By the end of the current Parliament, the Government should ensure it has implemented measures to enhance and support digital equine identification. This will help improve traceability.*

Conclusions and recommendations

Background and scope of inquiry

1. The Government's withdrawal of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill introduced in 2021, has stalled progress on key animal welfare issues. These delays have allowed the continuation of poor animal welfare practices. The then Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs assured us that the Department was "reasonably confident" it will be able to get all of its manifesto commitments into law. We welcome the recent introduction of Bills on welfare measures including livestock worrying; puppy imports; the importation of dogs, cats and ferrets; and pet abduction. We further note that the Government was relying heavily on Members who were successful in the Private Members bill ballot being willing to take on its handout bills to deliver its manifesto promises, rather than committing to bringing forward the legislation itself. While on this occasion it may prove successful, it was nonetheless a risky strategy. (Paragraph 7)
2. *In order to implement much-needed robust animal welfare safeguards, the Department must ensure that every provision from the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill is brought into force during the current Parliament.* (Paragraph 8)

Pet Breeding

3. It is estimated that less than half of puppies entering the market are from licensed breeders. Many breeders will be unlicensed because they fall below the three-litter threshold specified under LAIA regulations, effectively making them untraceable. The lack of traceability enables unscrupulous, low welfare breeding practices to flourish under the radar. More stringent safeguards are needed to ensure robust protections for the welfare of dogs and their puppies. (Paragraph 28)
4. *The litter licensing threshold for dog breeding should be reduced from three to two per 12-month period. A list of all licensed sellers should be publicly available, which would allow for verification and provide assurance to buyers. Care should be taken to ensure that future legislative changes to the breeding framework do not discourage groups such as families from breeding from a much-loved pet, or hinder farmers and gamekeepers from being able to produce the next generations of working dogs.* (Paragraph 29)
5. *The Government should produce clearer guidance for local authority enforcers regarding Section six of LAIA regulations, which prohibit the breeding of dogs where there are reasonable expectations that their genetics or health would lead to welfare problems. This guidance should include a list of breeds for which it is unlikely that a licence would be issued, and exceptional cases in which they might.* (Paragraph 30)
6. There are currently few legal safeguards to protect cats and their kittens, as cat breeding is not a licensable activity. Cat breeding should be awarded the same legislative safeguards and regulations as dog breeding under LAIA regulations. (Paragraph 31)

7. There are significant welfare concerns over the ‘puppy yoga’ trend, which involves the use of underage and potentially unvaccinated puppies in a setting that may be highly detrimental to their health and wellbeing. The Department should work with sector organisations to review how these welfare concerns could be most effectively addressed—for example through introducing stronger regulations, or introducing an outright ban of this practice. (Paragraph 32)

Canine Fertility Clinics

8. The rise in Canine Fertility Clinics, from 37 in 2020 to over 400 in 2023, is of significant concern. Many are likely being operated without veterinary involvement, with invasive procedures classed as acts of veterinary surgery being performed unlawfully by lay-persons, to the detriment of the animals involved. Unscrupulous Canine Fertility Clinics have benefitted from diffuse enforcement arrangements, lack of clarity over which statutory body is responsible for enforcement under the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966), and uncertainty as to where concerns around suspected illegal activity should be reported. (Paragraph 43)
9. *The Government should introduce a new Veterinary Surgeons Act to update that of 1966. This should include the regulation of Canine Fertility Clinics. The Department should work with local authorities and relevant sector bodies to draft and publish guidance covering the training and knowledge that would be required for local authority enforcers to effectively regulate Canine Fertility Clinics.* (Paragraph 44)
10. *The current £100 fine on summary conviction for performing acts of veterinary surgery illegally is a derisory deterrent and is well below the cost of most, if not all, veterinary procedures. The Government should bring the fine for individuals illegally performing acts of veterinary surgery in line with the financial penalties under The Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022. Alongside this, the Government should issue guidance setting out which enforcement body members of the public and veterinary professionals should report concerns to about suspected illegal veterinary surgery.* (Paragraph 45)
11. *The Government should work with the sector to formulate and introduce a public information campaign to raise awareness around welfare issues and harms of so-called ‘designer’ pets, particularly brachycephalic breeds, with the aim of discouraging acquisition of these breeds.* (Paragraph 46)
12. *Stud dogs should be brought within Licensing of Activities Involving Animals regulations. The inclusion of stud dogs would help give traceability and ensure welfare measures apply to male dogs kept for breeding, who otherwise fall outside the scope of the regulations.* (Paragraph 47)

Abuse and Manipulation

13. *Ear cropping, cosmetic tail docking and cat declawing are ethically abhorrent procedures which are likely to have lasting welfare implications for the animals involved. The Government must give priority to closing the loophole that enables the importation of mutilated animals. This legislation should be introduced as a matter of urgency, and certainly before the end of the current Parliament.* (Paragraph 60)

14. *It is all too easy to purchase DIY ear cropping kits online. This allows unscrupulous individuals to carry out this act of mutilation. Alongside closing the importation loophole, the Government should legislate to restrict the possession, hosting, sale and supply of DIY ear cropping kits. (Paragraph 61)*

Monitoring and enforcement

15. The financial situation faced by local authorities is affecting their ability to undertake activities including inspections, kennelling, investigations and enforcement. At the same time, the number of dogs from low welfare or illegal breeding establishments seized via local authority enforcement activities is resulting in capacity issues. Some local authorities struggle to execute warrants as there are insufficient kennel spaces for seized dogs. Sadly, some local authorities are being forced to put dogs to sleep because of lack of capacity and funding. (Paragraph 70)
16. Animal welfare legislation must be consistently and robustly enforced if it is to achieve its statutory objectives and act as a deterrent to unscrupulous breeders seeking to circumvent the law. Local authorities play a vital role in the licensing and enforcement activities that protect animal welfare. The ability of local authorities to perform key regulatory activities is constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training, and inadequate funding and resourcing. This results in an inconsistent approach nationally, and a postcode lottery in terms of levels of understanding and prioritisation of animal welfare issues. If enforcers are unable to meet their statutory duties under LAIA regulations, perpetrators may become emboldened to flout them. (Paragraph 71)
17. *A more consistent approach to training and accreditation for animal welfare officers is needed. Existing variations in training and enforcement puts animal welfare at risk. A central unit of suitably trained inspectors should be established which can be utilised by local authorities to improve collaboration and disseminate best practice. Wales has implemented a 5-year animal welfare plan which includes a focus on sharing and developing local authority knowledge and training. The Department should work with counterparts in Welsh Government, and the sector, to assess how similar measures could successfully be embedded in England. (Paragraph 72)*
18. *The Department should work with local authorities to assess the adequacy of existing kennel space capacity for seized dogs and implement measures to increase capacity if needed. (Paragraph 73)*

Pet importation — incidence and smuggling

19. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill proposed a series of measures including a ban on the import of young puppies and heavily pregnant dogs. These would significantly enhance protections for pets, and there is considerable sector and public support for bringing them forward. It is welcome that the Government is supporting upcoming Private Members' bills on areas including the import of dogs, cats and ferrets. We support these bills and encourage the Government to facilitate their passage through both Houses as quickly as possible. (Paragraph 84)

20. *As soon as possible, and certainly by the end of the current Parliament, the Government must ensure the following measures are implemented:*
- *A limit on the number of dogs, cats and ferrets that can be imported by an individual into the UK from five per person to five per vehicle, and three per foot or air passenger.*
 - *A ban on the importation of puppies and kittens under six months.*
 - *A ban on the importation of pregnant dogs and cats in the last 30% of gestation. (Paragraph 85)*

Biosecurity and pre-import health checks

21. *The movement of illegally imported dogs into the UK, and the importation of stray dogs for rehoming, pose considerable biosecurity risks for both pets and humans. Diseases such as rabies, leishmaniasis and Brucella canis may be imported into the UK from abroad. Of particular concern is the rise in Brucella canis cases in the UK, from 14 in 2020 to 75 in 2022. Imported dogs are also at increased risk of infectious diseases such as parvovirus as a result of low welfare breeding establishments, and cramped and dirty conditions whilst in transit. (Paragraph 93)*
22. *The Government should mandate pre-import screening measures to control and restrict the movement of dogs from countries which have endemic diseases, such as Brucella canis and leishmaniasis, that are not present in the UK. Accordingly, all imported dogs from these countries should be tested for relevant non-endemic diseases. (Paragraph 94)*
23. *The Government should introduce a requirement for a rabies blood (titre) test by a veterinary professional before a dog enters the UK. The post-rabies vaccination waiting period should be increased from three to 12 weeks. This would help mitigate the risk of rabies entering the country via imported dogs, as well as ensuring that puppies and kittens cannot be imported under the age of six months. This would have the added advantage of tackling puppy smuggling. (Paragraph 95)*
24. *The Government should shorten the tapeworm treatment window from 24–120 hours to 24–48 hours; introduce mandatory tapeworm treatment for imported cats as well as dogs; and reintroduce compulsory tick treatments for all non-commercial movements of cats and dogs. (Paragraph 96)*

Pet importation — responsibility, monitoring and enforcement

25. *Carriers play a key role in the pet importation and checking process. It is likely that there is a conflict of interest inherent in the requirement for carriers to conduct checks on their customers' pets. It is not evident that carriers are striking the right balance between speed, checks, profit and identifying non-compliance. We also have strong reservations that checking manifests on an ad hoc basis is an appropriate measure for a rigorous system. We have concerns about the robustness of a pet importation system that is based on 100% documentary checks at ports. (Paragraph 111)*

26. *Responsibility for border pet checks should be moved from carriers to qualified Government agency professionals. This should include a requirement for permanent 24/7 staffing cover at ports of entry. (Paragraph 112)*
27. We welcome the introduction of new legislation to ban the export of live animals, including cattle, sheep and horses, for slaughter and fattening. There is a low risk and high reward element to the equine trade, with unscrupulous individuals taking advantage of lax border controls to move equines on fraudulent passports. Some of these horses will be sold for meat to European slaughterhouses. (Paragraph 113)
28. *Alongside the ongoing Animal Welfare (Live Exports) Bill, stronger control measures are needed to prevent the trafficking of horses for slaughter. By the end of the current Parliament, the Government should ensure it has implemented measures to enhance and support digital equine identification. This will help improve traceability. (Paragraph 114)*

Formal minutes

Tuesday 26 March 2024

Members present

Sir Robert Goodwill, in the Chair

Rosie Duffield

Barry Gardiner

Dr Neil Hudson

Mrs Sheryll Murray

Selaine Saxby

Draft Report (*Pet Welfare and Abuse*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 114 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 16 April 2024 at 2.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 04 July 2023

Sarah Carr, CEO, Naturewatch Foundation; **Dr Melisa Donald**, Council Member, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons; **Dr Justine Shotton**, Senior Vice President, British Veterinary Association; **Dr Sean Wensley**, Senior Veterinary Surgeon for Animal Welfare and Professional Engagement, PDSA

[Q1–49](#)

Dr Paula Boyden, Veterinary Director, Dogs Trust; **Dr Maggie Roberts**, Director of Feline Welfare, Cats Protection; **Jessica Stark**, Director of Communications & Public Affairs, World Horse Welfare; **Becky Thwaites**, Head of Public Affairs, Blue Cross

[Q50–87](#)

Tuesday 05 September 2023

Dr Samantha Gaines, Head of Companion Animals, RSPCA; **Pip Griffin**, Senior Dog Warden, Worcestershire Regulatory Services; **Marisa Heath**, Adviser, Local Government and Animal Welfare Group

[Q88–151](#)

Bill Lambert, Health Welfare and Breeder Services Executive, The Kennel Club; **Dr Gudrun Ravetz**, Chief Veterinary Officer, Pets at Home; **Alexandra Baker**, Chief Operating Officer, Pet Industry Federation

[Q152–201](#)

Tuesday 17 October 2023

John Keefe, Chief Corporate and Public Affairs Officer, Getlink (Eurotunnel); **Gavin Stedman**, Director Port Health & Public Protection, Heathrow Animal Reception Centre; **Steve Lawrie**, Port Operations Manager, Group Pet Travel Coordinator, Brittany Ferries; **Tim Reardon**, Head of EU Exit and Company Secretary, Port of Dover

[Q202–240](#)

David Holdsworth, Chief Executive, Animal and Plant Health Agency; **Nicola Hirst**, Director for Service Delivery, Animal and Plant Health Agency

[Q241–277](#)

Wednesday 18 October 2023

David Martin, Group Animal Welfare Advisor, IVC Evidensia; **James McNally**, Partner, Slee Blackwell Solicitors; **Dr Lawrence Newport**, Lecturer in Law, Royal Holloway University of London; **Dr Samantha Gaines**, Head of Companion Animals, RSPCA

[Q278–332](#)

Tuesday 28 November 2023

The Rt Hon Lord Benyon, Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; **Marc Casale**, Deputy Director for Animal Welfare, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

[Q333–435](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

PWA numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 3rd Planet Solutions Limited ([PWA0059](#))
- 2 Against, Paws ([PWA0006](#))
- 3 Animal Protection Agency ([PWA0058](#))
- 4 Association of Dog and Cat Homes ([PWA0027](#))
- 5 Association of Dogs & Cats Homes (ADCH) ([PWA0076](#))
- 6 BaBBA Campaign (Ban all Baby Bunny Ads) ([PWA0060](#))
- 7 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([PWA0033](#))
- 8 Bell, MS Virginia ([PWA0021](#))
- 9 Bettinson, Professor Vanessa (Professor of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, De Montfort University) ([PWA0029](#))
- 10 Blue Cross ([PWA0043](#))
- 11 Blue Cross ([PWA0063](#))
- 12 British Veterinary Association ([PWA0052](#))
- 13 Bromsgrove District Council; Malvern Hills District Council; Redditch Borough Council; Worcester City Council; Wychavon District Council; and Wyre Forest District Council ([PWA0004](#))
- 14 Campaign for Evidence-Based Regulation of Dangerous Dogs ([PWA0080](#))
- 15 Canine & Feline Sector Group ([PWA0042](#))
- 16 Cats Protection ([PWA0064](#))
- 17 Companion Animal Sector Council ([PWA0071](#))
- 18 Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation ([PWA0026](#))
- 19 Coulthard, Sophie ; Lewis, Lisa Marie ; Hallett, Nadia ; Strong, Rebecca ; Dixon, Joanne ; Collier, Nikki ; Downey, Rose ; and Borisevica, Agnesa ([PWA0073](#))
- 20 Davies, Julie ([PWA0013](#))
- 21 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([PWA0032](#))
- 22 Dog Breeding Reform Group ([PWA0040](#))
- 23 Dog Control Coalition ([PWA0075](#))
- 24 Dog Control Coalition ([PWA0055](#))
- 25 Dogs Trust ([PWA0078](#))
- 26 Dogs Trust ([PWA0036](#))
- 27 FOUR PAWS UK ([PWA0017](#))
- 28 Gray, Miss Katharine (Customer Care Advisor, Pet People Veterinary Care) ([PWA0062](#))
- 29 Heathrow Animal Reception Centre ([PWA0079](#))
- 30 Hope Rescue ([PWA0041](#))

- 31 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0074](#))
- 32 IVC Evidensia ([PWA0051](#))
- 33 Independent Cat Rescue Prestwich ([PWA0012](#))
- 34 Janny, Mrs Elizabeth (Director, Bizzy Lizzys cleaning services) ([PWA0001](#))
- 35 Jones, Mrs Cath ([PWA0005](#))
- 36 Jowitt, Dr Joshua (Lecturer in Law, Newcastle Law School) ([PWA0010](#))
- 37 League against Cruel Sports ([PWA0035](#))
- 38 Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECD) ([PWA0057](#))
- 39 Lonsdale, Dr Tom ([PWA0069](#))
- 40 NOAH (National Office of Animal Health) ([PWA0054](#))
- 41 National Equine Welfare Council ([PWA0046](#))
- 42 Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0070](#))
- 43 Naturewatch Foundation ([PWA0038](#))
- 44 Naturewatch Foundation; All-party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group (APDAWG); UK Centre for Animal Law (A-law); Hope Rescue Centre; Focus on Animal Law (FOAL); Jordan Shelley, animal welfare campaigner; Scottish SPCA; and British Veterinary Association (BVA) ([PWA0056](#))
- 45 Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) ([PWA0034](#))
- 46 PDSA ([PWA0050](#))
- 47 Pet Industry Federation ([PWA0053](#))
- 48 Pet Theft Awareness ([PWA0048](#))
- 49 Pets at Home ([PWA0044](#))
- 50 Protect our Pets ([PWA0037](#))
- 51 Pupils 2 Parliament ([PWA0030](#))
- 52 RSPCA ([PWA0018](#))
- 53 RWAF ([PWA0024](#))
- 54 Ravetz, Dr Gudrun (Chief veterinary officer, Pets at Home) ([PWA0072](#))
- 55 Reyniers, Professor Diane (Professor, LSE) ([PWA0016](#))
- 56 Richardson, ([PWA0014](#))
- 57 Schnauzerfest ([PWA0045](#))
- 58 Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) ([PWA0031](#))
- 59 The Animal Behaviour and Training Council ([PWA0009](#))
- 60 The Kennel Club ([PWA0015](#))
- 61 The Self Help Group for Farmers, Pet Owners and Others experiencing difficulties with the RSPCA (The SHG) ([PWA0039](#))
- 62 The Welsh Government ([PWA0028](#))
- 63 Tuks Law Scan Me ([PWA0068](#))
- 64 Tuks Law Scan Me ([PWA0020](#))
- 65 Whittaker, Mrs Helina ([PWA0023](#))

- 66 Woodgreen Pets Charity ([PWA0019](#))
- 67 World Horse Welfare ([PWA0047](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Soil Health	HC 245
1st Special	Food Security Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 2022–23	HC 37
2nd Special	Soil Health: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2023–24	HC 649

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture	HC 23
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-designate of the Environment Agency	HC 546
3rd	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste	HC 22
4th	Rural mental health	HC 248
5th	Species Reintroduction	HC 849
6th	Protecting Marine Mammals in the UK and Abroad	HC 697
7th	Food security	HC 622
1st Special	Tree Planting: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2021–22	HC 323
2nd Special	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 412
3rd Special	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 700
4th Special	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1044
5th Special	Species Reintroduction: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1931
6th Special	Marine Mammals: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1942
7th Special	Rural Mental Health: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1945

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Moving animals across borders	HC 79
2nd	Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition	HC 78
3rd	Tree planting	HC 356
4th	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector	HC 713
5th	Pre-appointment Hearing: Chair of Ofwat	HC 1253

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	COVID-19 and food supply	HC 263
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	HC 1042
3rd	The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain	HC 231
4th	Flooding	HC 170
5th	Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual	HC 468
6th	Public Sector Procurement of Food	HC 469
7th	Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply	HC 1156
8th	Seafood and meat exports to the EU	HC 1189