

Cross Party Group on Animal Welfare Meeting
6.00pm Tuesday 12 December 2017
Committee Room 5

Present:

MSPs

Christine Grahame MSP (Convener)
Colin Smyth MSP
Emma Harper MSP
Alison Johnstone MSP

Associate Members

Helene Mauchlen, British Horse Society
Tricia? ... , British Horse Society
Ed Hayes, Kennel Club
Charlotte Longster, Dogs Trust
Paula Boyden, Dogs Trust
Kirsteen Campbell, Scottish SPCA
Mike Flynn, Scottish SPCA
Howard Bridges, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home
Scott ... Office of Emma Harper MSP
Adam Reid, University of St Andrews
Patricia Saluja, University of Aberdeen
Diane Bain
Seonaig Johnston, Greyhound Rescue
Andrew Voas, Scottish Government
Louise Dowdles, Scottish Government
Tricia Colville, BVA/BSAVA
Alison Craig, Napier University
Libby Anderson, OneKind
Kat Affleck

Apologies

Gail Ross MSP

Nicolle Hamilton BASC
Kevin Flack IFAW
John Burns Wild Horse Welfare
Leanne McPacke Wild Horse Welfare
Richard Clare Cats Protection
John Robins Animal Advice Line
Julia Stoddart SACS
John Bruce BDS
Brian Robinson
Elizabeth Omerod

1. Introductions

The Convener (CG) opened the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies

CG intimated apologies as listed above.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved subject to minor corrections.

4. Puppy Trade - presentation

Paula Boyden (PB), Veterinary Director, Dogs Trust, described the problems within the UK and Scottish puppy trade. There continued to be considerable demand for puppies and it was not possible to fill this through sources such as Kennel Club assured breeders or other reputable licensed breeders. Demand was being met via the trade from Europe which exploited the PETS travel scheme which was intended for the movement of genuine pets. Some re-homing organisations were importing dogs and the relevant EU legislation – the Balai Directive – was not being applied. On welfare, the Transport Regulation EC 1/2005 was applicable to dogs but was inadequate.

The original PETS travel scheme was amended in 2012. Under the present scheme, while animals must be microchipped, there is no requirement for the chip to be registered on a database. Animals may travel three weeks after vaccination, and as the vaccine is given at 12 weeks, this means that puppies should not travel before 15 weeks of age. Since 2012, imports of dogs had increased by 60% with increases of 663% from Hungary, and 780% from Lithuania.

Dogs Trust was working with authorities including UK Border Force and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) at ports in Kent. 80% of the pups seized on arrival were specialist breeds such as French Bulldog, English Bulldog and Dachshund. This demand for certain breeds was reflected in the rise of registrations – for example, the number of French Bulldogs registered had risen from 14,000 to 21,000.

Dogs Trust had undertaken three investigations focusing on Eastern Europe – Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and Poland. On one “postbus” transport, the investigator had seen puppies in very small containers on a 30-hour journey. The transport made two stops but the puppies were not fed during this time.

Dogs Trust investigation findings included:

- PETS was being abused, for example by puppies under 15 weeks being certified as older, and used for illegal imports. Vets in source countries were known to falsify information on pet passport and generally would only face a reprimand and 50 euro fine if detected. Lithuanian authorities had recently announced that only government vets would be allowed to issue passports.
- Poor husbandry, such as pups kept under stairs, was common
- The provenance of parent dogs was often unclear
- Lack of socialisation
- Appalling travel conditions and lack of traceability
- Checks at ports were not fit for purpose – Dogs Trust had been able to “smuggle” a microchipped stuffed toy puppy across borders
- Significant risk of importing diseases
- The importance of recording the date when a dog arrived in the UK, as this was relevant to disease control
- Unfit animals were travelling, such as a pregnant bitch who still had stitches in from a previous caesarean operation.
- Fighting breeds and dogs with cropped ears were being imported.
- Dogs from non-EU countries such as Serbia were entering the trade.

Regarding disease, the risk from rabies was relatively low but there were greater risks of vector-borne and zoonotic disease such as those transmitted by ticks. Leishmaniasis, transmitted by sandflies, was also potentially zoonotic. Some of these diseases could become endemic in the UK. It was worrying that tick treatment was no longer mandatory.

Distemper had been found in a dog shipped, along with other rescue dogs, from Bosnia. Such dogs were often dispersed around the country to new homes.

The Dogs Trust view was that a ban on third party sales would not stop people abusing the PETS scheme to bring puppies into the UK.

5. Puppy Trade - Discussion

Andrew Voas (AV) said that the Scottish Government (SG) shared the concerns. While the PETS was EU legislation to allow free movement with dogs, it had not been anticipated that it would be used so easily to allow the import of puppies from Eastern Europe. SG was consulting colleagues from DEFRA.

The SG had committed to a publicity campaign to highlight the risks of buying pets in certain ways. Public demand for certain breeds was encouraging smuggling, and this was exacerbated by the gap in prices between the EU countries of origin and the UK.

Mike Flynn (MF) raised the issue of dogs allegedly rescued from overseas for rehoming in the UK. He was aware of drop-off points for dogs in Dumfries, Glasgow and north of Aberdeen. There was not absolute evidence of the dogs' origins from the rescues. The trade in puppies was ridiculous and demand needed to be stopped.

CG mentioned the Member's Bill that she was preparing, with the intention of launching a consultation in January. Part of the approach was to place responsibility on the person acquiring the puppy, as well as the vendor. People should consider whether they had the right lifestyle for living with a dog. She had not yet considered the disease issues.

CG noted that the available figures were on a UK basis.

Ed Hayes (EH/KC) mentioned the penalties for puppy smuggling. PB said that these were woeful, including a maximum prison term of three months. A consignment of bulldogs could be worth £24,000, making the risk worth while.

MF said that HMRC had recouped £9m in tax from puppy sellers. He had no objection to breeders who sold healthy, well socialised pups.

CG added that her Bill also contained a proposal for every sale to be subject to a registration requirement.

6. MSP updates

Alison Johnstone (AJ) noted that in recent months she had lodged questions about compulsory CCTV in slaughterhouses, veterinary inspections at slaughter, mountain culling and sport shooting. She had spoken at the LACS/OneKind anti-foxhunting demonstration and was working on a possible Member's Bill to ban foxhunting. She had also supported stakeholders on issues including the Wallyford greyhound racing track, tail docking of dogs, and the use of electric shock collars.

Colin Smyth (CS) highlighted his work on snaring including a Member's Debate on a Motion for a complete ban. He was also pressing for a full ban on electric shock collars. He was pressing the SG for its proposals on increased sentencing for animal cruelty offences, particularly as the Westminster Bill had just been announced. He intended to speak in the Stage 3 debate on the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill and had written to the Cabinet Secretary about puppy smuggling. He would support the AJ Bill on foxhunting.

Emma Harper (EH/MSP) had also followed up on issues of greyhound racing and puppy smuggling, with a second Member's Debate about to take place. She was gathering information about licensed dog breeders in Scotland and understood there were 18 in Dumfries and Galloway, with large numbers of breeding bitches in some establishments. She would attend a demonstration of the use of vibrating dog collars and was working with Marc Abraham of Pupaid on third-party sales.

CG had also worked on the issues of snaring, CCTV, foxhunting, electric shock collars and puppy farming, which would be addressed in her Bill. She had lodged a question on live exports. For future reference, she had applied for a CPGAW display stand in the Members' area, hoping to repeat the very successful stands of 2014. As before, she would like to demonstrate positive aspects of human relationships with animals. She would notify the Group of the dates for the stand as soon as she received them.

AJ asked for members' views on the use of vibrating collars. All were opposed to the use of aversive stimuli although it was acknowledged that vibrating collars allied to positive reinforcement might be acceptable for deaf dogs. EH/KC said that the Kennel Club was hosting a drop-in session in the Parliament prior to Maurice Golden's debate on shock collars, calling for a full ban rather than regulation.

7. Scottish Government update

AV reviewed the Programme for Government commitments on animal welfare and the need to deliver on the most important issues over the next year or so. The circus Bill was approaching Stage 3 and despite debate over some amendments, would send a strong message that this sort of entertainment would not be tolerated in Scotland. Finishing the Bill would free up time for two members of the SG animal health and welfare team. He confirmed that the Bill covered the overwintering of animals if they were displayed.

Research into the puppy trade and purchasers' motivations was complete and made around 20 recommendations. It had not received much publicity, but a major marketing campaign would follow in the spring. It would also cover the problems of purchasing brachycephalic breeds, aiming to interrupt demand by promoting the rehoming message.

A three-month consultation on sanctuaries and rehoming centres had begun. These were not currently regulated other than by general animal welfare legislation. Establishments with 5-10 animals would be subject to a registration requirement, while those with more than ten would require a licence. It was intended that the Scottish SPCA inspect licensed premises, including those re-homing dogs from abroad, and would visit registered premises. The aim was for a flexible, modern licensing system.

The Performing Animals Regulation Act 1925 was also due for a review. Concerns had been raised in the course of the circus Bill over the use of reindeer, birds of prey, animals in schools etc and it was hoped to introduce licences with meaningful conditions for these.

A consultation on the use of CCTV in slaughterhouses was in preparation,

It was also intended to amend the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to increase the available penalties and introduce a scheme of fixed penalty notices. This would aid enforcement of breaches such as the microchipping regulations.

There had also been considerable discussion of the need to recognise the sentience of animals, as currently provided by Article 13 of the TFEU. There had been some misunderstanding of the status of this requirement and whether it was already provided in law. The UK government had just published the Animal Sentience and Sentencing Bill, which required Ministers of the Crown to have due regard to the sentience of animals; however, questions continued as the Scottish Ministers are not Ministers of the Crown. SG and DEFRA would discuss this.

LA provided a summary of the new Bill for members.

8. Topics for next meeting

Battersea had requested a discussion of sentencing.

Alison Craig (AC) requested further discussion of greyhound welfare.

Diane Bain (DB) suggested looking at the welfare of fish.

9. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 13 March 2018