

PE1396/G

STAFFORDSHIRE BULL TERRIERS (PE1396)

Submission from The National Dog Warden Association (Scotland)

What are your views on the issues raised in the petition?

The NDWA is in agreement that Staffordshire Bull Terriers (Staffies) are being over bred and cross bred in large numbers by certain sections of society who either cannot or will not care for them properly and who are only interested in any money that they can make for the sale. NDWA believes that the person at the end of the lead is at the centre of the problem as opposed to the dogs themselves regardless of the breed.

At present if a control is put in place to limit the number of Staffies being bred, NDWA believes that members of the public will just move onto the next easily available breed. As mentioned by John Wilson in relation to collies/greyhounds, there seems to have been a cycle of overbreeding of certain breeds over the years and the current trend is for staffies. NDWA feels that the problem of excessive breeding in all dogs needs to be tackled and not just one specific breed.

NDWA believe that there is a surplus number of dogs in society and not enough loving responsible homes to cope. Confirmed by Lisa Hird "For every dog that we manage to find a home for there are another 10 waiting to come in."

Dogs are often seen as disposable commodities these days. If the dog does not act or behave in the manner that the owner expects, they will often blame the dog resulting in the animal being rehomed or ending up in kennels because it has been allowed to stray. Instead of addressing the problem and seeking help to modify any unwanted behaviour, these owners simply change the dog for a new one, believing that this one will be better behaved. Because these dogs are so readily and cheaply available, it makes them easy to replace.

NDWA is in agreement that something needs to be done as its members have personally experienced problems with trying to help people re-home their unwanted pets. They are frequently being faced with full rehoming kennels/centres, often leaving owners with no other option than to put their family pet to sleep.

The lack of space available in welfare centres is problematic for the owners as, being unable to rehome their dog, can often worsen their circumstances. Ultimately, the dogs suffer and often end up as welfare cases, being passed on to irresponsible owners or even being put out on the street.

NDWA does agree that the problem needs to be tackled but is concerned with regards to the following issues;

Richard Stiff advises that "if overbreeding is allowed to continue, the only outcome will be that dogs are destroyed in large numbers – in other words a cull"

The NDWA agree that a solution needs to be found before this is the only option available and if the route of the problem is not tackled there may be no other alternative.

Mr Stiff suggested “introduction of new legislation to control the overbreeding”

In the ideal world this seems like the best solution. However there are many problems associated with this:

- Who is going to enforce this? With the many cut backs within local authorities, there simply isn't the man power or the financial resources available to police this;
- What is the punishment if someone does not comply? If this is not severe enough then certain members of society may not see it as a deterrent, the financial gain being worth the risk of getting caught.

One of the suggestions mentioned by Bill Walker & Ian Robb was to “licence every dog breeder” again NDWA has concerns over:

- How this will be enforced and by whom? Again, local authorities do not have the finances or manpower to enforce this and area already over stretched with their existing duties;
- There will undoubtedly be those who do not comply and fail to obtain a licence . It is not viable to check all dogs for a licence and so non compliance will only come to light when there is report of a problem or incident with the dog/s concerned. It is highly likely that responsible owners would register, but irresponsible breeders would continue as they are.
- Just because the owner has a licence does not make them a responsible owner;
- On the spot fines would be unlikely to impact the breeder as the amount may be seen as negligible when compared to the potential hundreds or even thousands of pounds that they can earn by selling puppies. Even if the fine was a substantial amount, there is the potential for lengthy and costly court proceedings in cases of non payment.

THE SOLUTION

The NDWA is suggesting that the Scottish Government provides funding for Local authorities to work with local vets to offer reduced cost/free neutering and spaying of all dogs regardless of the breed. That way the problem of overbreeding as a whole is tackled and the problem does not just transfer from staffies to another breed in the future. Many of these owners enjoy the company of having a dog but sadly do not have the finances available to have the dog neutered. Often the dog is caught accidentally and a litter of unwanted puppies is born, the puppies are rehomed to similar circumstances and the cycle of irresponsible breeding/ownership continues. If the Government was to help with funding this would solve the problem of unwanted litters and therefore reduce the number of unwanted dogs in kennels.

This solution has been proven to work in Clackmannshire where by in the past the council, dog owners and the vet split the cost of getting the dogs neutered. This meant that the dog was not caught accidently therefore producing a litter of unwanted puppies. The Clackmannshire dog warden states that this scheme has a positive impact on the people of Clackmannshire in respect of their attitudes towards neutering / spaying. Within the first year members of the public got their bitches spayed but did not get their dogs neutered however by the end of the scheme 25-30% of the

owners using the scheme were getting their dogs neutered. This was through continued education to the owners as to the benefits of getting their dogs spayed / neutered. This scheme is no longer being run due to the funding being unavailable. However the local dog warden would welcome the scheme back should the opportunity arise.

When the Scottish Government are considering the costs of putting such a scheme into place. The long terms costs of owning a dog should be looked at. If for example a dog is owned by a responsible owner, spayed /neutered and brought up in a responsible manner the cost of this dog to society would be x amount. However if a dog is born into society where by the owner is not looking after it and it continually strays, causing nuisance, becomes aggressive, and the owner ends up on charges and is brought to court over the dog. The overall cost of that problematic dog in terms of local authority enforcement of legislation to the dog owner and then the ongoing courts fees etc is far greater. If a spay / neutering scheme is put into place it means the more problematic dogs in society are less available and therefore this will reduce the overall cost to society of these dogs.

Can you provide the committee with details of your own experience of the situation with reference to Staffordshire Bull Terriers?

1st April 2009 – 1st April 2010

COUNCIL	Percentage of total that were staffys	Second top number in relation to breed type	Third top number in relation to breed type
West Lothian	15.4%	18.5% Mongrel	16% Terrier
Aberdeenshire	7%	14% Labradors	17.8% Collies
Perth & Kinross	11.89% SBT	30.77% collie	16.78% Labrador

1st April 2010 – 1st April 2011

COUNCIL	Percentage of total that were staffys	Second top number in relation to breed type	Third top number in relation to breed type
West Lothian	23%	15.7% Collie	12% Terrier
Aberdeenshire	6.6%	17.7% Labradors	16.5% other terriers
Perth & Kinross	17.42% SBT	17.42% labrador	11.60% collie

1st April 2011 – 29th September 2011

COUNCIL	Percentage of total that were staffys	Second top number in relation to breed type	Third top number in relation to breed type
West Lothian	25%	16% Collie	9.4% Labrador
Aberdeenshire	18.5%	18.5% Labradors	16.6% Collies
Perth & Kinross	12.33%SBT	21.90% labrador	13.7% collie

As you can see from the above figures and this is only a representation of three council authorities that Staffordshire Bull terriers are not alone in the grand scheme of the problem, the numbers are just as high for collies and labradors.