



Our ref ETRA211021

Paul Davies MS
Chair of Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

10 November 2021

Dear Paul,

I took two action points from the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee held on 21st October 2021.

The first was raised by yourself in relation to the seafood strategy:

P.135 - ...the seafood strategy for Wales that was launched in 2016? In that strategy, there was a target for delivering an increase of about 30 per cent. So, could you give us an update on whether we've delivered that target and what the latest information is about the strategy?

The Welsh Seafood strategy, developed by the Seafish Wales Advisory Committee, was launched during Seafood Week in October 2016. The strategy outlined the Welsh seafood industry's vision for sustainable growth during the period 2016 to 2025. While Welsh Government are observers on the Seafish Wales Advisory Committee, the strategy, and any associated targets, is an industry developed and owned document.

I understand that at the Advisory Committee's meeting in October, it was agreed that the strategy was no longer appropriate in a post Brexit and Covid 19 context, and would no longer feature in the Committee's forward work plan.

The second issue was raised by Carolyn Thomas MS about checking microchips in dogs at border controls:

P.157 - ...about pets, about dogs. Would it be possible to check for chips in dogs at border controls as well? Is that something that could be looked into as we look at having the border controls movement of animals? Could we just scan to see if there is a chip in that dog, and if they're on a register of lost pets, maybe? Is that something we could look into?

I would like to outline some of the steps being taken in relation to the pet theft, and the findings from the Task Force; the ongoing research on the microchipping Regulations; the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill and proposed changes to the PET scheme and existing border controls in Wales and GB.

A Pet Theft Task Force, covering the UK, was established by the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and Defra and their findings were published on 3 September 2021

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pet-theft-taskforce-report/pet-theft-taskforce-report>

Some of the recommendations are being actioned, specifically in relation to the databases operating within the UK and elsewhere, to ensure the system is streamlined and checks are more readily accessible and auditable. Welsh Government officials will continue to work with their counterparts in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure changes made to the collection, holding, and accessibility of data is tightened up.

Additionally, a research project on the effectiveness and enforcement of the existing microchipping Regulations in England, Scotland and Wales is coming to fruition which should indicate where enforcement procedures need to be reinforced or improved. It is worth noting the proposal to include compulsory microchipping of kittens/cats is also part of this research project.

At present it is a requirement to scan a puppy or dog entering GB via ports either as part of the PET scheme or as a commercial importer. Wales are included in the UK Governments Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill 2021 which is progressing through the Parliamentary process and this Bill includes 4 main proposals as follows:

- a) Increasing the minimum age of imported and non-commercial dogs from 15 weeks to 6 months;
- b) Banning the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs with non-exempted mutilations;
- c) Reducing the number of animals that can travel under the non-commercial pet travel rules; and
- d) Prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of a bitch (dog) who is more than 42 days pregnant.

The Bill also aims to create penalties for non-compliance with a), b) and c), punishable by either a term of imprisonment, or a fine (or both). The detail on this is still being worked on, and whilst it is subject to the recently closed and soon to be reviewed consultation on Commercial and Non-Commercial Movements of Pets, it is the intention of this Bill to not only amend the conditions that pets can travel under for welfare reasons, but also to discourage the lucrative trade in pet animals that misuses both methods to move animals into Wales.

Both the commercial and non-commercial routes that facilitate movements of pet animals into GB require that the animal is microchipped before (for commercial) or before/during (for non-commercial) vaccination.

For non-commercial movements into Wales, pets accompanied by their owners must use an approved route and carrier, unless they are travelling from Ireland. Cardiff Airport is not an approved route, and the only routes for pets to enter Wales are via the Dublin to Holyhead, Rosslare to Fishguard and Rosslare to Pembroke ferry crossings.

Whilst each operator has different rules for how a pet must travel on board their ferries, they should all comply with the basic requirements of being microchipped and vaccinated, however checks on these routes are not undertaken by the carriers, due to the unique travel arrangements between GB and the island of Ireland.

The commercial route differs in that animals from a third country must enter via a Border Control Post (BCP). At present there are no Welsh BCPs, but the process at other GB BCPS is for the microchip and documentary requirements to be checked by an Official Veterinarian – this is much more enforceable, with non-compliance supported by legislation allowing animals to be detained to undertake further checks. When BCPs are operational in Wales, imports of non-commercial pets from the EU will also need to enter via a BCP, a change further enhancing the controls in place to detect non-compliant imports. Work outlined above to improve microchip databases should also further our commercial import controls.

In addition to the above, I would like to mention the Welsh Government has recently published Our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW). The AWPW includes the animal welfare commitments published in the Programme for Government, as well as ongoing specific Welsh policy development, and reference to working in collaboration with the rest of the UK/GB where this strengthens enforcement and prosecutions.

I trust the above explains the complex landscape within which we are working. Please be assured we will continue to issue strong messaging on this issue. Enforcement agencies will continue to operate with the existing and future legislation to reduce pet thefts in the first instance and also ensure the speedy re-homing to the original owner wherever possible.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Materion Gwledig a Gogledd Cymru, a'r Trefnydd
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