

Rebecca Evans AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Chair of the Environment and Sustainability
Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

23 December 2014

Dear Alun

Thank you for your letter of the 25th November following your roundtable discussion on animal welfare with key stakeholders on the 5 November 2014. I will respond on the points in the order in which you raised them.

Control of Dogs

You will be aware the Welsh Government was satisfied that the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 (ASBCP Act) would deliver many of the provisions that the draft Control of Dogs Bill would have met. To help local authorities to understand the dog control aspects of the ASBCP Act more easily, my Officials have been involved in developing the guidance for local authorities. It was the collaboration between Welsh Local Authority Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Welsh Government Officials that resulted in the enforcement flow diagram being developed as well as helping to proof the text of the guidance. This was issued to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) who advised they would disseminate the guidance and I enclose a copy for your information.

In terms of general training in relation to the ASBCP Act, I understand there has been training available to local authorities. It is my intention to ensure we make the connections between our domestic and UK legislation so that we have a cohesive approach. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that their staff are properly trained to deal with offences under that legislation.

I note your comments on responsible dog ownership in Wales and I am still minded to have this work undertaken. My Officials are in the process of drawing up proposals for my consideration and I will update the Committee in due course. I can confirm that I would expect any engagement via the review work to be cross cutting and include key stakeholders in the third and public sectors.

As part of these proposals, I will be seeking a consideration of the rapid review report produced by the Public Health Wales "Rapid Review of Death of Children from Dog Bites or Strikes" which was finalised in the summer.

Electric Shock Collars

We are in discussion with the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group on a range of animal welfare issues. It will include seeking their view on the existing legislation of using electronic collars on dogs and cats. A paper is being submitted to the Framework Group in the New Year and it will be on their agenda for their meeting in March.

Dog breeding

You will know that the Regulations were made on the 9th December. They will come into force on the 30th April 2015. We have and will continue to work closely with local authorities and the third sector in the fulfilment of these Regulations.

We are committed to raising the welfare standards of dogs and puppies kept in breeding establishments and a review of the staff:adult dog ratio and the effectiveness and enforcement of the Regulations will be carried out after a full year of operation.

I can advise that I met with key stakeholders on the 5th and 6th November, prior to the dog breeding Regulations being made, and this included local authorities and other relevant organisations.

Microchipping

In my statement on the 22nd September, I commented that the previously stated date of 1 March 2015, by which all dogs in Wales should be microchipped, is unlikely to be achieved. The work on drafting the Regulations is ongoing. When finalised, but before they are laid in the National Assembly, they will be submitted to the European Commission under the Technical Standards Directive for consideration. A standstill period for a period of three months will then apply. Therefore, at this time, I cannot give you a specific timetable but I have committed to providing updates on progress.

Circus animals

In response to an oral question on 26 November, I gave reassurances that I would support a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. I am due to meet with Lord de Mauley to discuss progress on proposed UK legislation in the New Year.

Animal Sanctuaries

I recognise the good work that has take place on in preparing the report "the case for the Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales". I will be writing shortly to the chair

of the Animal Welfare Network Wales and to the Petitions Committee about this and I will copy my response to you for information.

Resources for local authorities

I note what you say on the adequate resourcing of local authorities to deliver animal welfare enforcement functions effectively. I recently raised this with a Welsh Local Government Association representative who did not identify resourcing issues. I was advised that local authorities are working in closer collaboration to make better use of resources and expertise. I would be willing to look at this in more detail but local authorities have responsibility for animal welfare functions where they may enforce action.

Non-stun slaughter

The Council Regulation 1099-2009 - Protection of Animals at Time of Killing, requires animals to be stunned before slaughter. This principle can be “disapplied” in relation to animals killed to meet religious requirements, at the discretion of competent authorities within each Member State. This provision has been implemented into domestic Regulations in Wales (Welfare of Animals at Time of Killing (Wales) Regulations 2014), Scotland and Northern Ireland, whilst England have yet to introduce the EU Regulations into domestic legislation and are using earlier legislation that permits non stun slaughter in England. Now that the EU Regulation 1099/2009 has been implemented in Wales, Welsh Government will give further consideration to the welfare of animals at time of killing.

There is no legal obligation to gather specific non-stun data from abattoirs in Wales. However, these data have been commissioned from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to inform the Welsh Government of the numbers of animals slaughtered by the non-stun method in Wales. The Welsh Government has no plans at this time to make this data available to the public due to the sensitivities surrounding the publication of commercial data. Welsh Government will review the data and consider its publication at an appropriate time in the future. There are two slaughterhouses in Wales approved to conduct non stun method of slaughter to meet religious purposes.

Animal welfare is one aspect of this complex and sensitive policy area. The Welsh Government is also obligated to take account of legal duties and responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. To date, the Welsh Government has not held discussions with external stakeholders.

The Welsh Government is not aware of any scientific reviews that are being undertaken by the European Commission specific to the subject of non-stun slaughter. However, the Welsh Government is aware of a European Commission study on the opportunity to provide consumers with the relevant information on stunning of animals. That includes the feasibility of method of slaughter labelling. It is understood through communications with UK representations in Brussels that the Commission is considering the study.

The findings of the study, once known, may provide Member States with recommendations for future labelling provisions. The relevant departments within Welsh Government responsible for Animal Health and Welfare, Food Policy, Health and Communities and Tackling Poverty can then consider the recommendation presented.

I trust that that I have addressed all your questions and I will update the Committee in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca". The letters are cursive and connected, with a slightly slanted baseline.

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