

Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru
National
Assembly for
Wales



Rebecca Evans AM
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food
Welsh Government

CC: David Melding AM, Chair of the
Constitutional and Legislative Affairs
Committee; William Powell AM, Chair of the
Petitions Committee

25 November 2014

Annwyl Rebecca

Roundtable discussion on animal welfare

You will be aware that the Environment and Sustainability Committee held two roundtable discussions on animal welfare at its meeting on 5 November 2014. The aim of the session was to gain an insight from stakeholders on progress in relation to current animal welfare issues in Wales.

The purpose of this letter is to draw your attention to the issues discussed, and to raise some specific points emerging from the discussion.

1. Control of Dogs

During the discussion, it became clear that stakeholders continue to regret that Welsh legislation on control of dogs was not progressed. Despite this, it was also clear that that Welsh stakeholders are keen to see the new powers provided for in the UK's Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 ('the Act') working effectively.

We heard concerns, however, about the lack of training provision for local authorities on the new powers and their effective implementation. Several stakeholders expressed concerns that without proper training enforcement officers could 'unwittingly' introduce Orders that compromise dog welfare

Bae Caerdydd
Caerdydd
CF99 1NA

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

and stigmatise dog owners. Concern was also expressed that, due to the nature of the Act, communication about guidance and enforcement has been provided via the community protection network and has by-passed a number of relevant officers within Welsh local authorities.

Therefore, we would be grateful if you could outline:

- **What steps the Welsh Government is taking to ensure that effective communication takes place with Welsh local authorities about the new powers available to them;**
- **To confirm whether the Welsh Government intends to provide any guidance to local authorities on the use of these enforcement powers; and**
- **To outline whether training will be made available to local authority enforcement officers on the effective use of the powers provided to them.**

Stakeholders welcomed the commitment made by the previous Minister for Natural Resources and Food to keep the effectiveness of the powers provided for in the Act under review.

We also heard that the Working Group on responsible dog ownership was welcomed by stakeholders, in the light of Welsh legislation being dropped.

We note that discussions with RSPCA Cymru about the remit and terms of reference for the group are on-going. **We would, however, like your assurance that the group will include a wide range of organisations and individuals, including representatives of working dogs such as gamekeeper organisations, BASC and the Countryside Alliance.** In addition, we would be grateful if you could set out:

- **The remit, terms of reference, and timescales for establishment of the group; and**
- **The timescale for the review of the effectiveness Crime and Policing Act 2014 in addressing dog control issues in Wales.**

2. Electric shock collars

The evidence received from stakeholders at the session confirmed the widespread support for the Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010.

We note that the previous Minister, Alun Davies, indicated that the Welsh Government would be reviewing this legislation over the summer of

2014. We have not yet heard the outcome, therefore we ask that you provide us with the timescale for this review.

3. Dog breeding

We welcome the laying of the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations on 18 November 2014. We note that, as a result of the concerns raised by the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee, the provisions in relation to microchipping originally contained in the regulation have been removed. The concerns raised by the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee were borne out in evidence we received from stakeholders.

However, stakeholders also noted the importance of the microchipping provisions for the effective enforcement of the breeding of dogs regulations. Whilst we warmly welcomes your commitment to addressing the serious concerns raised about the microchipping provisions we would urge the Welsh Government to bring forward the microchipping regulations as soon as possible. **We welcome your commitment to keep Members updated as work on the microchipping regulations progressed but would also be grateful if you could outline the timeline for the re-laying of the Animal Welfare (Identification of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations.**

As you will be aware, stakeholders have on-going concerns about the ratio of staff to dogs, the way in which the staff ratio applies to puppies and the situation of working dogs including hounds in packs. We note that you have acknowledged these concerns in your written statement on the introduction of the revised regulations and that local authorities will be asked to feedback on the effectiveness of the regulations.

We would be grateful if you could confirm:

- **When local authorities will be required to feedback on the effectiveness of these regulations;**
- **Whether you remain open to revisiting the regulations and the concerns of stakeholders should they not prove effective in improving the welfare of animals kept and bred in relevant establishments; and**
- **Whether the working group on dog ownership will have any role in reviewing the effectiveness of these regulations.**

4. Microchipping

As set out above, we note that some stakeholders continue to have concerns about the delays to the introduction of the regulations and **we ask that you clarify the timescale for their introduction.** The local authorities'

representative in particular told us that not knowing the timescale for the introduction of this legislation makes it difficult to protect existing resource and make bids for additional resource to deliver these functions.

Having said this, we also note that stakeholders have said that the delays provide an opportunity to improve the content of the regulations previously laid before the Assembly. Specifically stakeholders called for:

- The need for the responsibility for micro-chipping to be on the seller, rather than the owner;
- A single point of contact for the various databases and ease of communication between databases;
- The need for databases to be linked to Europetnet;
- Provision for local authorities to be able to issue fixed penalties for non-compliance with the regulations; and
- The need to remove barriers to a multi-agency approach to enforcement.

5. Circus animals

We are aware that you have made a commitment to push for legislation on the prohibition of wild animals in circuses to be formally included within the UK Government's legislative programme. **We would like an update on progress in this regard.**

6. Animal Sanctuaries

The animal welfare charities, the British Veterinary Association and Torfaen County Borough Council expressed serious concerns about this issue. We note that an Animal Welfare Network Wales report, '*The Case for the Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales*', which investigated the need to regulate animal sanctuaries was provided to the Welsh Government in 2012.

We are aware of the Petitions Committee's letter to the previous Minister in March 2014 asking for the outcome of his considerations of the report and that this committee has yet to receive a response to its letter. **We therefore ask that you confirm whether the Welsh Government has any plans to develop regulations in relation to animal welfare sanctuaries in Wales.**

7. Resources for local authorities

You will already be aware of our concerns about the adequate resourcing of local authorities to deliver the animal welfare enforcement functions effectively (raised by us in our letter on the 2015-16 Draft Budget proposals).

This issue was raised again by stakeholders during the roundtable session. **We consider this to be a serious issue and look forward to receiving a response to the concerns we raised in our letter to the Finance Committee.**

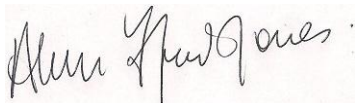
8. Non-stun slaughter

You will be aware that two of our stakeholders, namely the RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association, have launched separate petitions calling for an end to non-stun slaughter of animals. **We would, therefore, like further information on the extent to which non-stun slaughter currently takes place in Wales and any discussions you have held with interested stakeholders about this issue.**

Hybu Cig Cymru told us about scientific reviews being undertaken by the European Commission on this subject which are due to be completed by the end of 2014. **We are sure that the Welsh Government will be giving consideration to the findings of this work and ask that you provide us with details of how you intend consider these reviews.**

As a number of these issues relate to issues being considered by the Petitions Committee and the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee, this letter has been copied to the Chairs of those committees.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Ffred Jones', on a light-colored rectangular piece of paper.

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee