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Recent animal welfare updates

Action needed to promote responsible dog ownership. Following a number of serious incidents involving dogs in Wales, RSPCA Cymru is strengthening its calls for the Welsh Government to launch a public awareness campaign to encourage responsible dog ownership. A public awareness campaign headed by the Welsh Government could remind dog owners across Wales of the urgent need to act responsibly, in order to protect both human and animal welfare. With temperatures set to rise over the coming weeks, the RSPCA has also launched its own annual campaign to remind owners of the dangers of leaving dogs in hot cars and taking them on walks in warm weather. This comes after receiving much-welcome confirmation from the Welsh Government that 'Dogs Die in Hot Cars/Ceir Poeth yn Lladd Cŵn messaging will be displayed alongside our motorways for another year - making Wales the only UK administration to have taken such action to date.

Disappointment as Kept Animals Bill (KAB) withdrawn by Westminster. Following a lengthy delay in relation to progress on the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, it has now been confirmed that the proposed legislation has been withdrawn by the UK Government. When introduced in 2021, the Bill promised to tackle issues such as livestock worrying, the keeping of primates as pets, live exports, puppy smuggling, the import of dogs with cropped ears and pet theft. Despite predominantly focusing on non-devolved issues relevant to animals such as imports and exports, the Bill was expected to pave the way for action to improve welfare in Wales too. With the UK Government now expected to legislate on the issues that would have been covered by KAB individually, it is important that consideration is given as to how this will impact Wales. In the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, KAB is cited as a key area of joint policy collaboration with the UK Government. It is therefore vital that animals in Wales will still be able to benefit from the new approach that has been chosen.

Agriculture (Wales) Bill near to completion in the Senedd. The Agriculture (Wales) Bill is now near to completion, with the mandatory stage 3 proceedings having taken place in the Senedd on May 16. Multiple amendments to the proposed legislation were considered but a clear majority of Members of the Senedd chose to reject those that would have allowed the use of certain snares to be licensed for conservation purposes. As well as outlawing the use of snares and glue traps, the Bill could also eventually see farmers who adhere to higher standards of animal welfare financially incentivised and rewarded - a concept which has long been supported by the RSPCA. While the Bill is expected to grant Ministers with the relevant powers in this respect, there is seemingly no legal obligation for them to be used with further detail needed on how these payments could work. With there also being the potential for a joint consultation on mandatory labelling of animal products with other UK administrations, RSPCA Cymru urges the Welsh Government to consider how farm animal welfare in Wales could be further improved after the Agriculture (Wales) Bill becomes law.

Puppy breeding enquiries and prosecutions rise again in Wales. New figures collected by RSPCA Cymru show that the number of puppy breeding enquiries and prosecutions across local authorities in Wales rose again in 2022. Under the Freedom of Information Act, RSPCA Cymru asked all 22 local authorities as to how they are tackling illegal puppy breeding in their respective counties, with the number of enquiries and prosecutions higher in comparison to the previous year. Meanwhile, RSPCA Cymru continues to call on the Welsh Government to consider raising the current standards required of licensed dog breeding establishments. Despite current regulations, we continue to see unlicensed breeders operating illegally and it is in these circumstances where we usually see dog welfare being compromised the most.

Promotion of responsible dog ownership much-needed in Wales

In light of recent incidents that have occurred in Wales, RSPCA Cymru is strengthening our calls for the Welsh Government to launch a public awareness campaign to promote responsible dog ownership. Sadly, there have been a number of incidents - particularly in South Wales - where irresponsible dog ownership has contributed towards serious injuries and fatalities, with urgent action needed to protect human and animal welfare.

The RSPCA is among the many organisations who have long considered the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (DDA) to be an outdated piece of legislation, with recent events further highlighting the evident need for a new approach. The DDA uses a dog's type or appearance to determine whether or not they have the potential to be dangerous, with four types - the Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Fila Brasileiro and Dogo Argentino - banned under Breed Specific Legislation (BSL). However, as these types are largely identified by their appearance, rather than genetics, DNA or parentage, this outdated legislation has led to the unneeded euthanasia of countless dogs throughout the UK. Despite the DDA nearing its 32nd anniversary, the number of hospital admissions for dog bites rose by at least 154% in the 20 year period between 1999 and 2019. While 48 people died in dog-related incidents in the UK between 1987 and 2017, 53 of the 62 dogs (85%) involved were not on the prohibited breeds list¹.

As it stands, there is no robust evidence to suggest that prohibited types are more likely to be involved in dog bite incidents or fatalities in comparison to other breeds. Because of this, the RSPCA is among the many animal welfare organisations who do not support the notion of more breeds or types of dogs being banned in the UK. Instead, we are calling for an overhaul of the DDA, proper enforcement of the rules around stopping the illegal and irresponsible breeding/selling of dogs and a public information campaign to promote the importance of responsible ownership and the need for training.

While the Dangerous Dogs Act is not a piece of devolved legislation, we believe the Welsh Government could undertake a proactive approach in terms of reminding dog owners in Wales of their obligation to keep their animal under proper control in all places, at all times. The Welsh Government could also actively encourage members of the Welsh public to seek help if they are concerned about their dog's behaviour or someone else's and urge people to report any suspicions they have about illegal breeding to their local authorities. A public awareness campaign could also cover other elements of responsible dog ownership, while advising owners where to turn for advice and resources. While dog licensing has recently been raised by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd in the Senedd - with this being something the RSPCA is very supportive of - it is likely the Welsh public are keen to see more imminent action. Because of this, we encourage the Welsh Government to consider what can be done in the interim of any legislative changes to encourage responsible dog ownership and protect the welfare of both people and animals in Wales.

As well as promoting responsible dog ownership, the Welsh Government could also help raise awareness of the impact high temperatures have on dog welfare. The RSPCA has recently launched its annual campaigns - [Dogs Die In Hot Cars](#) and [Dogs Die On Hot Walks](#) - to raise awareness of the welfare risks dogs face during the summer months. RSPCA Cymru was delighted to receive recent confirmation from the Welsh Government that 'Dogs Die in Hot Cars/Ceir Poeth yn Lladd Cŵn' messaging will be displayed alongside our motorways again this year - with Wales still being the only UK nation to have taken such action as it stands.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What action is the Welsh Government taking to tackle irresponsible dog ownership in Wales?**
- 2. What further consideration has the Minister given towards launching a public awareness campaign to encourage responsible dog ownership?**
- 3. Does the Welsh Government have any plans to help raise awareness of the welfare risks hot weather poses to dogs?**

¹ <https://www.rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/bsl>

Uncertainty high following the withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill

On May 25, long-held concerns around the withdrawal of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill were affirmed by the UK Government². The RSPCA is among the many animal welfare organisations who were disappointed to receive this confirmation, after waiting almost two years for the Bill to be progressed by Westminster. The Kept Animals Bill (KAB) would have improved the lives of millions of animals in the UK by restricting the keeping of primates as pets, banning the export of livestock for slaughter or further fattening and tackling livestock worrying. The Bill also promised to limit the non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets, create specific new offences linked to pet theft and close the legal loophole on importing mutilated dogs into the UK. While KAB has now been dismantled, the UK Government has stated that the issues covered by the long-awaited Bill will now be pursued separately. While we are glad these commitments will not be forgotten entirely, the RSPCA is concerned over the uncertainty surrounding timeframes ahead of next year's General Election, as well as how a new approach will impact Wales.

The Welsh Government had previously indicated that it would be minded to introduce an LCM (Legislative Consent Memorandum) in the Senedd, which would have allowed the provisions of KAB to be applied to Wales. Within the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#), KAB is cited as a key area of policy collaboration, with [supplementary LCMs](#) having previously been formed by the Welsh Government in both 2021 and 2022. With the UK Government now looking to legislate on the issues previously covered by KAB individually, potentially via Private Members' Bills, consideration now needs to be given with regard to how these new plans will impact animals in Wales.

Several of the issues KAB looked to legislate on, such as imports and exports and criminal offences, fell outside of the Welsh Government's legislative competency, hence the previous appetite for a joined-up approach. However, at least one of the Bill's provisions could be acted on by the Welsh Government - the keeping of primates as pets. Across the border, Defra have agreed they will pursue licensing through secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. This in itself provides the Welsh Government with an opportunity to enact stricter standards in Wales. Previous estimates suggest there around [120 primates](#) being kept as pets in Wales - with RSPCA Cymru having long called for this practice to be outlawed. The Welsh Government previously held reservations in terms of whether this issue needed to be tackled in Wales, despite previous polling showing that approximately [72% of the Welsh public](#) believe primate ownership should be banned. RSPCA Cymru strongly believes that primate ownership in domestic settings is both cruel and dangerous as the keeping of these intelligent, sociable and complex animals in a household environment is incompatible with their wild natures.

Unfortunately, the RSPCA has needed to rescue monkeys whose welfare has been compromised by their owners in Wales and has directly encountered how primate ownership can lead to suffering. In 2021, an individual from Newport was [banned from keeping animals for life](#) after videos surfaced online of them flushing their pet marmoset down a toilet, feeding it kebabs and offering it cocaine. Banning the keeping of primates as pets has strong support among Members of the Senedd, with both the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru featuring commitments to outlaw the practice in their 2021 Senedd manifestos. While the UK Government has indicated that it will still seek to consult on primate ownership in England ahead of the summer recess, we encourage the Welsh Government to consider whether it should undertake its own approach to protect primate welfare in Wales. Wales has demonstrated its ability to set its own high standards of animal welfare in recent years, therefore a domestic focus on primate ownership could further demonstrate our prowess as a leader in this respect while saving countless monkeys from a life of misery in inappropriate settings.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Government's planned approach to issues such as livestock worrying following the withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill?**
- 2. Has the Minister held any relevant conversation with the UK Government since it was confirmed that the Kept Animals Bill has been dismantled?**
- 3. Would the Welsh Government consider proposing its own legislation to outlaw pet primate ownership in Wales?**

Agriculture (Wales) Bill on course to improve welfare in Wales

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/animal-welfare-statement>

On May 16, the mandatory stage 3 debate on the Agriculture (Wales) Bill took place in the Senedd. During this debate, Members of the Senedd (MSs) discussed several amendments to the Bill, including those that would have allowed the use of certain snares to be licensed. RSPCA Cymru is among the many organisations who were concerned that an exemption for certain types of snare, namely humane cable restraints, would create a legal loophole for animal cruelty. We therefore welcome the decision undertaken by a clear majority of MSs (38/52) to vote against the proposals³. With no further opportunity for MSs to table amendments to the Bill, it will feature full bans on the use of both snares and glue traps once it becomes law - making Wales the first UK nation to take such action.

As well as banning these methods of wildlife control, the Agriculture (Wales) Bill will also grant Ministers with powers to financially incentivise and reward farmers who adhere to higher welfare standards. While RSPCA Cymru has long called for such action from the Welsh Government following the UK's exit from the European Union, we are concerned that the provisions featured do not go as far as to make it a legal requirement for Ministers to utilise these powers. While we had previously hoped that incentivising higher welfare farming would be featured on the face of the Bill, we now look forward to working with the Welsh Government to shape the payments scheme that will follow once legislation is passed. We are currently awaiting the completion of the Bill's stage 3 proceedings, with the final stage 4 debate expected before summer recess begins on July 17.

While specific details around how rearing animals to higher welfare standards will be incentivised as part of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill are still to be confirmed, progress has been made on another issue relevant to farm animal welfare in Wales. On May 26, a [summary of responses](#) to the Welsh Government's recent consultation on introducing mandatory closed-circuit television (CCTV) in slaughterhouses was published, in which it was confirmed that regulations will now be drafted. More than 15,000 animal lovers responded to an RSPCA Cymru campaign which encouraged them to respond to the consultation which ran from November 2022 - February 2023, demonstrating the strength of public support for the proposals. Introducing mandatory CCTV in these establishments is both a [Programme for Government](#) and Welsh Labour manifesto commitment, and it is hoped that regulations will be passed on to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee for their consideration after summer recess.

While the Agriculture (Wales) Bill has been previously cited as the biggest opportunity to improve farm animal welfare in Wales since the onset of devolution by the RSPCA, the Welsh Government could go even further by introducing mandatory method-of-production labelling on animal-derived products. A UK Government consultation on labelling is expected to be launched soon, with there being the potential for this to feature a joined-up approach with Wales. RSPCA Cymru has long called on the Welsh Government to consider how it can assist consumers in Wales make more informed choices about the meat, fish and dairy products they consume by strengthening statutory requirements on food labelling. Method-of-production labelling would give renewed confidence and assurance to consumers and producers, and potentially revolutionise purchasing decisions in the same way whole egg labelling has done in recent years. As it stands, unclear or absent labels continue to cause confusion and make it difficult for consumers to make adequately informed decisions, or make purchases in line with their intentions. We therefore encourage the Welsh Government to consider how this can be rectified and whether there is scope for a joined-up approach with other UK nations on this matter.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm how the Agriculture (Wales) Bill will pave the way for farmers who adhere to high animal welfare standards to be rewarded for their efforts?**
- 2. Will the Minister confirm what the next steps are in terms of introducing compulsory CCTV in slaughterhouses, and whether a timeframe can be given?**
- 3. Has the Welsh Government considered a joint approach with other UK administrations in terms of introducing mandatory method-of-production labelling on animal derived-products in Wales?**

Prosecutions and enquiries into illegal puppy breeding remain on the rise

New figures collated by RSPCA Cymru have revealed that the number of prosecutions and enquiries into illegal puppy breeding in Wales have continued to rise year on year. Under the Freedom of Information Act, RSPCA Cymru requested information from all 22 local authorities in Wales in relation to how they are currently tackling puppy breeding in their respective council areas. The reported data shows that the number of enquiries with

³ <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/13344>

regards to puppy breeding across local authorities in Wales has increased by 16% - up from 372 in 2021 to 442 in 2022. Local authorities also took on an additional prosecution in 2022, with this marking an increase of 12%.

Carmarthenshire County Council received the highest number of enquiries of all local authorities in Wales for the second year running - despite receiving less queries year on year. Cardiff and Caerphilly also make up the top three councils who received the most enquiries. Local authorities are responsible for the licensing of breeding establishments and ensuring that dog breeders uphold the conditions of their licences. However, these figures further demonstrate that there is a prevalent issue with regards to puppy breeding in Wales, and in turn, we call on the Welsh Government to improve Wales' dog breeding regulations.

In the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, the Welsh Government stated that it will consider updates to the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014, with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd recently confirming that a review of this legislation is planned⁴. The way a dog is bred, reared and socialised as a puppy has a long-term impact on their behaviour and we encourage the Welsh Government to ensure that this is reflected appropriately in all devolved legislation relevant to dog breeding. The Welsh Government has invested in a successful training programme for local authorities to tackle illegal/backstreet breeding as this results in dogs that have not been behaviourally assessed being sold into communities. However, many rescues and rehoming centres in Wales are currently full, with a lack of spaces for seized dogs posing a significant challenge to enforcement officers and the rescue sector. Having nowhere for seized dogs to go while they are assessed for their behaviour or type could see them remain in communities longer than they should.

In November 2020, the Welsh Government published its response following an expert Task and Finish Group by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group⁵, which made 55 recommendations. Improved training for local authorities was among the recommendations made and RSPCA Cymru welcomes recent confirmation from the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd that the aforementioned Local Authority Enforcement Project will be extended for another three years. However, a number of other recommendations such as reducing the current staff-to-dog ratio so that one person is not caring for up to 20 puppies, conducting unannounced inspections and introducing a national database of breeders have not yet been taken on board. Because of this, it is hoped that the planned review of the 2014 Regulations will take these and the need for improvements to accommodation, socialisation and enrichment standards into consideration to ensure that dog welfare is at the forefront of a revised legislative approach.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Will the Welsh Government review the impact of the Animal Welfare (Licencing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 on the sale and breeding of illegal puppies?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm if any progress has been made in terms of reviewing the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) Wales 2014 regulations?**
- 3. Can the Minister make a statement on the future of the Welsh Government's Local Authority Enforcement Project, its success to date and what it will focus on over the next three years?**

RSPCA Cymru incidents March - May 2023

From March to May 2023, the RSPCA responded to 3,032 incidents across Wales, a 24.4% decline on the previous year. However, this remains an exceptionally busy time for the RSPCA's officers, centres and branches as well as the charity's emergency line.

⁴ <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/13266>

⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-government-response-review-animal-welfare-breeding-dogs-wales-regulations-2014>

Local authority	March 2022 - May 2022	March 2023 - May 2023
Blaenau Gwent	86	78
Bridgend	176	123
Caerphilly	213	173
Cardiff	471	323
Carmarthenshire	252	187
Ceredigion	59	66
Conwy	208	158
Denbighshire	158	128
Flintshire	216	146
Gwynedd	137	104
Isle of Anglesey	105	74
Merthyr Tydfil	66	57
Monmouthshire	91	67
Neath Port Talbot	224	172
Newport	187	140
Pembrokeshire	127	128
Powys	149	123
Rhondda Cynon Taff	241	187
Swansea	367	293
The Vale of Glamorgan	182	98
Torfaen	125	82
Wrexham	175	125
TOTAL	4,014	3,032

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