

Editorial Board

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Ian has a Master's degree in Veterinary Parasitology and is a member of the European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP UK and Ireland).

Animal welfare to be protected by UK law

This spring saw the passing of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill in the House of Commons, moving it a step further towards royal assent and a permanent place in UK law. This uphill battle, fought by the Better Deal for Animals coalition, an alliance of 50 of the leading UK animal organisations including the RSPCA, PETA, Human Society International, Cats Protection and Dogs Trust, to name a few, and its dedicated campaigners has been ongoing since 2019 as, in the wake of Brexit, the EU Withdrawal Act 2018 did not transfer the principle recognising animals as sentient beings into UK legislation. This raised concerns among animal welfare campaigners as, contrary to EU law, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 UK law did not explicitly recognise animals as sentient, only that they can experience suffering and pain (Ares, 2019). The UK government was thus obliged to review the many gaps in its legislation.

Of equal importance to the companion animal sector is the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, due to have its report stage and third reading imminently (UK Parliament, 2022). This bill will review the microchipping act and the compulsory microchipping of cats and most notably, address the issue of illegal importation of companion animals by introducing an enabling power to apply restrictions on imports of pets. These restrictions will include a limit on the number of pet animals an individual or vehicle can bring into the UK; an increase in the minimum age of imported puppies and a proposed ban on the import of pregnant dogs and those with cropped ears, as these practices can cause significant distress and put animals at increased risk of disease and future behavioural problems (Local Government Association, 2021).

While it seems like great progress is being made, there are concerns surrounding the enforcement of these regulations. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (2022) has been working with local authorities, police and the RSPCA Inspectorate to consider solutions to better enforcement and is now currently putting together the results of its research. While the inclusion of the Fixed Penalty Notices Bill will ensure harsher penalties for those in violation, the Local Government Association (2021) expressed concerns that the expectation of local authorities to enforce these will add to the already unprecedented demand on regulatory services. In its statement on the second reading of the bill, the association stressed that it is crucial that Border Force and local authorities are given the resources required to enforce the new rules. For example, they will need access to veterinary surgeons and additional resources to recruit new members of staff. Adequate training of non-veterinary border personnel will also be important. Officers at points of entry should be supported and given the time to undertake thorough checks on vehicles, which is crucial as puppy smugglers will not declare young puppies or pregnant dogs on a movement document. To aid effective border inspections, significant fixed penalty notices could be introduced for the non-declaration of companion animals.

It can only be hoped that these challenges to the welfare of animals in the UK can be tackled at the source, if the government ensures that the relevant authorities have adequate resources to do so. [CA](#)

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