

The Rt Hon. Baroness Hayman of Ullock
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

22 November 2024

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you in response to the introduction of the private members' Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill. While we acknowledge that this proposed legislation represents a positive step forward in terms of animal welfare, we wish to raise some concerns regarding the potential impact of a blanket ban on the importation of puppies under six months of age. While well-intentioned, we believe this approach could have significant negative consequences for the long-term health of certain dog breeds in the UK.

There is no doubt that illegal puppy smuggling is a serious concern, and anecdotal evidence suggests that veterinary professionals are frequently confronted with very young puppies arriving with inaccurate paperwork, which raises biosecurity risks. The intention behind an age-based restriction is understandable, and we support efforts to address these issues. However, a blanket ban on puppies under six months could lead to unintended consequences, particularly in relation to breeds with small populations or those already classified as vulnerable, such as the Bearded Collie and Sussex Spaniel.

Moreover, while there are critical concerns with puppy smuggling relating to untraceable dogs, Kennel Club-registered dogs have both UK owners and overseas breeders details listed in both The Kennel Club's database, as well as in the exporting country's kennel clubs.

There are numerous breeds within the UK, particularly those with small gene pools, that rely on the importation of new breeding lines to maintain genetic diversity and protect the long-term health of the breed. These include:

- Irish Wolfhound (a vulnerable native breed)
- Skye Terrier (a vulnerable native breed)
- Barbet
- Lagotto Romagnolo
- Schnauzer

Since the relaxation of pet travel rules in 2012, the number of imported dogs registered by



THE KENNEL CLUB

The Kennel Club has nearly doubled, contributing to significant improvements in genetic diversity within our pedigree dog breeds. Ensuring a broad gene pool is essential for maintaining the overall health of these breeds, including those where genetic diversity is currently not an issue. A reduction in genetic diversity can lead to an increased prevalence of inherited diseases, as well as reduced fitness and fertility in these breeds. Furthermore, geographic isolation can have as large an impact on genetic diversity as inbreeding.

Additionally, the early experiences of a puppy, particularly during the first five months of life, are crucial for their mental and social development. If a puppy destined for breeding is unable to travel until six months of age, this will significantly delay their opportunities for training, socialization, and proper acclimatization to new environments. A late relocation can also cause unnecessary stress and hinder their continued development, which could have long-term implications for both their health and behaviour.

In order for the diversity of dogs in the UK to be protected, without undermining the core aim of the Bill, we would ask Government to first consider the inclusion of a mechanism, similar to those already in use by DEFRA with livestock and biological material importation and exportation, that would provide the necessary protocols and accompanying documentation to facilitate the movement of this small but significant group of responsible breeders and importers.

Thank you for considering our views. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further and work together to find a solution that balances both animal welfare and the long-term health of dog breeds in the UK.

Yours sincerely,