



THE KENNEL CLUB

# The dog people's manifesto

Calling on the incoming  
Government to help the  
nation's dog owners be able  
to care for their pets better





# Introduction from the Chairman of The Kennel Club

I'm a dog person and have lived with dogs my whole life. I am not unique; over a quarter of adults living in the UK have pet dogs, but unfortunately it has become increasingly difficult for us to care for them as we would like to.

For every aspect of dog ownership – from acquisition, to breeding, dog walking and dog training – the landscape has become more complex, bureaucratic, and burdensome. This is making it less appealing for many of us to breed and own pet dogs.

It is imperative that the benefits of dog ownership continue to be enjoyed and the history of the UK as a 'dog loving country' is maintained. Dog ownership has a huge positive impact on the mental health of all, from older to younger alike, of those who may otherwise be marginalised in society, as well as those who may be lonely, and encourages physical activity due to regular walking.

We are calling on the incoming Government to help the nation's dog owners be able to care for their pets better.

## Breeding

The Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations 2018 were introduced to improve the welfare standards of dogs bred and to increase the number of licensed breeders by reducing the litter licensing threshold. Five years on, our evidence suggests that it has not delivered on its objectives. More so it has worsened the puppy buying landscape. In the Government's own impact assessment, it was anticipated that approximately 5,000 dog breeders would require a licence and yet only just over 1,700 had one prior to the 2020 covid pandemic. The puppy boom significantly increased the number of dog breeders during that period, resulting in 2,200 breeders having a licence post-covid – still well below the number there should be. Moreover, the uplift in licences issued has largely been because low-volume breeders, breeding one or two litters per year, have applied for a licence as they have been unsure whether they required one, due to the complicated 'business test'. Contrary to Defra guidance, a significant number of local authorities have interpreted the business test such that any breeder with a trading income (not profit) of over £1,000 requires a licence, which most invariably will do as breeding dogs costs money.



It is our view that the key to improving how dogs are bred is to encourage those who love dogs to responsibly breed from their family pets in their own home – the hobby breeder has been the mainstay of UK dog breeding for the last 150 years. However, the licensing requirements, many of which are impractical for low-volume breeders and are aimed more at commercial breeders, who make use of kennels, have deterred many from doing so, which has resulted in a dwindling supply of dogs from high-welfare, low-volume breeders. This problem has been exacerbated by inconsistencies in how the regulations are interpreted and applied across the country (alluded to above). As a result we set up a Primary Authority agreement with the City of London to attempt to assist breeders subject to inaccurate and unreasonable interpretations of the licensing regulations by their local authority.

As a result of low volume breeders being deterred from breeding more dogs, illegal high-volume puppy farmers, with poor husbandry and lack of care, plus European importers, are filling the gap in the market to the detriment of the long-term health and welfare of pet dogs.

**We are calling on the incoming Government to help people who want to breed healthy puppies by reducing the burden on home breeders placed on them by the requirements of the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations 2018 and encouraging them to breed responsibly. This could involve removing the current complex business test so the only criterion for a licence is based on breeding three litters per year or more (as is the case in Scotland) and amending the guidelines to the regulations to recognise the difference between low-volume home breeders and high-volume commercial breeders.**

## **Brachycephalic/flat-faced dogs such as Pugs, Bulldogs and French Bulldogs**

Whilst there is a lot of criticism of how flat-faced dogs have been bred, it is their popularity amongst the dog-owning public, made worse by advertisement agencies and social media, that has exacerbated poor breeding practices. While demand for them may have now peaked and is in gradual decline, The Kennel Club still register a high number of these breeds and their health and welfare remain a key priority of our work. In 2016 we established the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), the first of its kind, comprising ourselves along with academic, veterinary, and welfare bodies, as well as government officials and breed clubs. The objective of the BWG is a world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the brachycephalic conformation. The strapline of the group is 'stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog', but this messaging alone is not enough.

We recognise that instead of just highlighting the risks of owning a typically brachycephalic dog, we also need to ensure they can be bred with an emphasis on their health and welfare so would-be owners can obtain a healthy example of the breed they desire. This is why we have invested significant resource into the development of the internationally recognised University of Cambridge/Kennel Club Respiratory Function Grading scheme; the only scheme which assesses a dog's breathing and provides a grade which advises as to whether it should be bred from.

**We are calling on the incoming Government to help people ensure their dogs live happy, healthy lives by encouraging and educating breeders and puppy buyers on the advantages of the Respiratory Function Grading scheme and its importance for the health and welfare of their chosen dog breeds. Further information about our work and collaborative recommendations to improve brachycephalic dog health can be found in our recently launched report, *Play Your Part – Breeding, Buying and Bringing up Brachycephalic Dogs Better*, which emphasises that Government, breeders, puppy buyers, dog owners, vets, pet insurance companies, rescue centres and online advertisers all have a part to play.**



# Importation of puppies and the need for genetic diversity

Importing young puppies into the UK is an avenue of trade exploited by puppy smugglers and dealers which has led to calls for puppy importation to be banned completely. Unfortunately, legislation alone is unlikely to deter such criminals, whilst genuine dog enthusiasts will be prevented from better protecting their beloved breeds by improving their overall health.

For some dog owners, particularly of less common breeds, the importation of young dogs (up to six months old) has been essential to the effective management of genetic diversity. Management of the genetic diversity in pedigree breeds is a major concern for The Kennel Club, dog breeders and scientists right across the world. Reduced genetic diversity is linked to an increase in the occurrence of inherited diseases and reduced overall fitness and fertility. This is of paramount importance to the UK's Vulnerable Native Breeds such as the Skye Terrier, Sussex Spaniel, and Bearded Collie, all of which are at risk of becoming extinct in the UK. Whilst the perception is that puppies shouldn't travel, it is harder for an adjusted younger dog to leave its home for overseas than a puppy.

Over the decades, The Kennel Club has developed a range of practical tools (such as an inbreeding calculator for potential matings), to help safeguard diversity in breeds. Thanks to these efforts, and easier importation of dogs into the country, the overall rates of inbreeding have declined in many breeds in the recent years.

**We are therefore calling on the incoming Government to ensure that if a ban on the importation of puppies under six months comes into force, that a very tightly controlled mechanism to allow breeders who can demonstrate a genuine need, from a genetic diversity perspective or to introduce a new breed into the UK, be permitted to import a single young dog under six months of age. We believe this could be readily achieved without creating unwanted loopholes.**

## Access to open green spaces

Walking a dog is an integral, vital, and enjoyable part of dog ownership – for dogs and people alike. Yet local authorities have the power to introduce wide, sometimes draconian, and varied Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), impacting where and when dog owners can walk their dogs and how many dogs they can walk at once.

While a lot of PSPOs are non-contentious, some are disproportionately restrictive, and yet difficult for the average dog owner, or even group of dog owners, to challenge. We estimate there are over 200 local authorities who have implemented PSPOs impacting dog owners, and as far as we know, we are the only organisation monitoring those relating to dogs. PSPOs have been used to ban dog walkers in winter months from otherwise empty beaches and ban all dogs from parks, usually based on the irresponsible activity of a minority. For many, the routine interactions they have on their dog walk form a key part of their social network, so dog bans can have a huge impact on peoples' social networks and subsequently their mental health.

**We are calling on the incoming Government to help people exercise their dogs adequately by ensuring that PSPOs are fair and enable dog owners to continue to exercise their dogs freely. For this to happen we believe the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act should be amended to provide a more accessible route for dog owners to challenge the validity and proportionality of Public Spaces Protection Orders, such as a binding mediation process or through the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.**

## Dangerous dogs and XL Bully dogs

We are disappointed at the recent addition of the XL Bully dog to the dangerous dogs list under the antiquated and discredited Dangerous Dogs Act, which has proved time and again to be an ineffective mechanism in preventing dog attacks and fatalities. The ban has caused anxiety and frustration amongst owners of dogs who may fit the very broad description of what an XL Bully is, as it is not a Kennel Club registered breed with a breed standard.

**We are calling on the incoming Government to help people who want to own and breed larger dogs by ensuring they do not live in fear of having their desired breed or type of dog added to an arbitrary list of 'dangerous dogs.' Instead, we would prefer to work with an incoming government on more effective preventative strategies.**



All our asks so far have called on the Government to amend current legislation or draw on best practice and behaviour-changing campaigns as an alternative to regulations in the future, but there are two areas where we believe new legislation would assist dog owners and improve the lives of dogs, and that is in relation to the continued legal use of electric shock collars, and the continued lack of regulation around fireworks.

## Electric shock collars

It is widely accepted that the use of electric shock collars to train dogs is not only detrimental to animal welfare but is, in fact, totally unnecessary. This is the combined view of all major animal welfare organisations, leading dog training organisations and UK and European veterinary bodies. With no specific legislation around dog training, it is even more imperative that people are not 'duped' into using these devices.

There was widespread cross-party support in the previous Parliament for a ban, and following public consultation the Government announced that it would introduce a ban on their usage and laid the Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) England Regulations 2023 before Parliament in April 2023, with an enactment date of 1 February 2024.

**We were bitterly disappointed that the regulations failed to pass in time for the enactment date and are calling on the incoming Government to re-lay this important Statutory Instrument and ensure that it comes into force as a priority.**

## Fireworks

The Kennel Club believes that current fireworks regulations should be revised to reduce unnecessary distress and trauma to dogs. The use of fireworks for traditional and religious events has long been a source of anxiety to dogs and their owners, however the increasingly common use of fireworks year-round has worsened this situation significantly. The negative effects of fireworks are not limited to dog welfare – The Kennel Club has previously collaborated extensively with the Children's Burns Trust and PTSD UK to raise awareness of the impact of fireworks.

**We are calling on the Government to make life easier for dog owners, indeed all pet owners, by restricting the use of fireworks to licensed events and lowering the maximum decibel limit of fireworks.**

## Current landscape and future progress

Animal welfare legislation to improve the welfare of pets has made huge strides forward since 2006. Regulations have been introduced and updated to protect dogs from pain, suffering, injury, disease and mutilations, and to improve reunification of lost or stolen pets and breeding practices (the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Microchipping of Dogs Regulations 2015 and the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations 2018). All these developments have generally been welcomed, albeit with some caveats over concerns for unintended consequences.

However, we are now at a crossroads whereby a lot of legislation concerning dogs – whilst positive and well-intended – is poorly enforced, and as such hasn't been tested through the legal court process for efficacy. Calls for even more regulations are rife but potentially with many unintended negative consequences – the main one being they are making it more burdensome and complicated for law-abiding, dog-loving people to own, breed and care for their dogs.

**We would urge the incoming Government to carefully consider their approach to further calls for regulations. More work instead needs to focus on education and changing behaviours in order that those who want to continue to breed, own and care for pet dogs can do so in a sensible, well-informed manner. As an organisation which invests entirely in improving the health and welfare of dogs and working with responsible breeders, we very much look forward to working with the incoming Government.**





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[thekennelclub.org.uk](http://thekennelclub.org.uk)