

THE IMPACT OF THE DOG TRADE ON CANINE WELFARE

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

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#SayNoToPuppyDealers



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SCOTTISH SPCA
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On 9 November 2017, the Scottish SPCA and the University of Edinburgh brought together experts from across the UK and Ireland to specifically address the issue of the illegal puppy trade and the importation of rescue dogs into the UK.

This briefing summarises the data presented at the conference and highlights key priorities for policy and practice, including strategies to tackle associated problems.

Summary of key findings

- 🐾 There has been a significant increase in the number of puppies entering the UK in recent years, due to consumer demand and changes in legislation that make it easier to transport pets.
- 🐾 Animal welfare organisations and key stakeholders are concerned about the escalation of illegal and irresponsible puppy breeding and trade, and the significant implications for the UK in practical, financial and health risk terms.
- 🐾 Abuse of legislation, and fraud, have been identified, with border checks largely ineffective.
- 🐾 More behavioural issues, health conditions and infectious diseases are evident among dogs raised in puppy farms, compared with those raised in other breeding environments.
- 🐾 Current activities, guidelines and expert advice, are having little impact on consumers, suggesting a lack of public knowledge and awareness regarding this issue.



The UK context

There is very high demand for puppies in the UK. Sales are facilitated by the internet and social media. Currently, there are an estimated 8.5 million dogs in the UK¹, with approximately 708,000 dogs required each year to sustain this population. The Kennel Club registers approximately 220,000 dogs annually each year from licensed breeders and unlicensed, but legal, low volume breeders. Whilst UK rehoming organisations also fill some of this demand, the vast remainder is being met by unlicensed illegal breeders and illegal importation of puppies for sale².

Whilst difficult to ascertain, as much activity goes undetected, the value of the puppy trade in Scotland is estimated to be a conservative £13 million per year³.

Non-compliance with legislation is an identified problem with widespread abuse of the EU Pet Travel Scheme (PETS), and the possession of a licence is no guarantee of high animal welfare standards. However, both the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) of the Scottish SPCA⁴ and the HMRC taskforce for cat and dog breeders⁵,

describe the illegal trade as organised crime. It is often linked with tax evasion and other criminal activity and can be very lucrative.

Operation Delphin, a multi-agency operation led by the Scottish SPCA, has led to successful prosecutions, but those involved have highlighted significant challenges that impede attempts to disrupt illegal trade. Major contributing factors are insufficient resources and a lack of expertise in identifying problems relating to imported animals at UK ports.

The Scottish Government and Defra, in collaboration with the University of South Wales and University of Northumbria, have already undertaken a major review of the scale of the trade in imported and illegally bred puppies and how associated animal welfare problems, fraud and other criminality could best be addressed³.

The purpose of the conference in November 2017 was to bring together operational and research findings in order to develop an evidence-based action plan to tackle the problems that face the UK.



Issues identified by animal welfare organisations & veterinarians

Changes to the Pet Travel Scheme rules in 2012 to harmonise pet travel across Europe resulted in a 61% increase in the number of dogs entering the UK in the first year of the controls being relaxed⁶. Changes included removal of the rabies blood titer test and tick treatment, as well as shortening the 'wait period' after rabies vaccination before travel.

Puppies can now travel at a minimum age of 15 weeks, when previously this had been 10 months. According to investigations by Dogs Trust, this has resulted in the scheme being used as a cover to illegally import puppies for commercial gain. Between 2011 and 2013, the number of dogs entering the UK from Central and Eastern Europe increased enormously, with a 780% increase from Lithuania and a 663% increase from Hungary. Dogs Trust has found that under-age puppies are now entering the country without the correct veterinary treatments, with vets in other countries having falsified data on their passports. In addition, the fraudulent use of microchips has meant that dogs entering the UK cannot be traced.

This is problematic if infectious diseases are subsequently identified.

Dogs Trust has highlighted limited inter-agency working and issues of non-compliance throughout Europe. Veterinarians are increasingly identifying mistreatment (including evidence of continuous intensive pregnancies amongst bitches) and the presence of various diseases and parasites. In a recent investigation, 77% of recently travelled dogs were found to have ticks, which, if left untreated, can cause long-term health issues⁷.

Lack of human contact and socialisation, dirty and stressful environments and the absence of vaccinations and required treatment protocols are viewed as significant and widespread problems affecting puppies entering the UK.

Key findings from new research

The effects of puppy farms

A recent Scottish SPCA and University of Edinburgh collaborative study^{8,9} has confirmed US findings¹⁰ that dogs from puppy farms exhibit significantly higher rates of undesirable behaviours than dogs from other breeding sources, particularly relating to fear, anxiety, and aggression (see Figure 1).

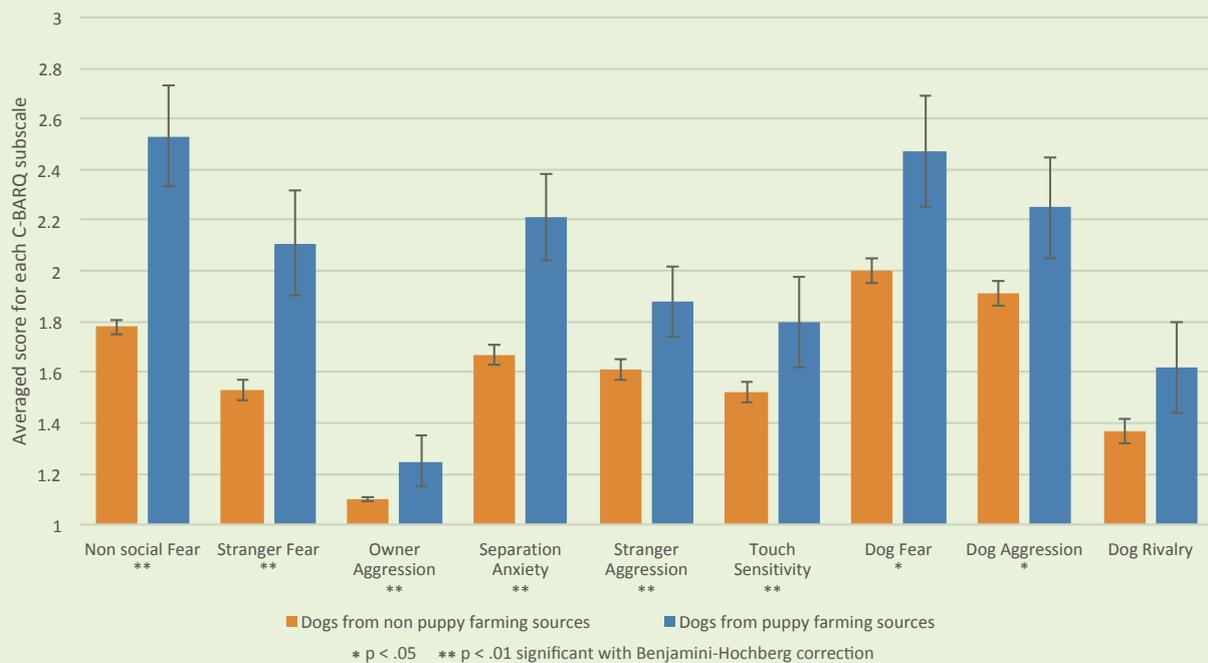
They are also more likely to have genetic disorders and/or carry infectious diseases



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such as parvovirus, an often fatal condition which can cost up to £4,000 to treat¹¹. Higher levels of dog walking were found to improve behavioural outcomes, but it is clear that owners need appropriate support for dealing with the behavioural and medical conditions associated with a puppy trade dog.

Figure 1: The effects of puppy farming on behavioural measures⁸



Note: C-BARQ = Canine Behavioural Assessment and Research Questionnaire

Rescue dogs

A recent study undertaken by the University of Liverpool and funded by the Animal Welfare Foundation¹² found that the majority of rescue dogs imported into the UK come from Europe and the Middle East, with the majority found on the street and 70% being specifically imported for an individual. 91.5% were adopted through an organisation and almost half were sourced via social media.

Although rescue dogs should be imported under the Balai Directive, 88.5% were imported under the EU Pet Travel Scheme. Only 1.2% were imported under the Balai Directive. Information was not known for 8.4% of the dogs, and data



were missing for the remaining 1.9%. 20% were imported with known health conditions and of those tested (533 out of 3,080), 14.8% were found to have Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease that has no cure and can be fatal if left untreated.

People reported a desire to buy a rescue dog from abroad because they perceived welfare to be far poorer than in the UK. They also believed that UK organisations were too strict in their requirements for owners looking to rehome a dog.

The sourcing of pet dogs

A multi-method scoping exercise funded by the Scottish Government and Defra, and undertaken by the University of South Wales and University of Northumbria³, has shown how change in the scale and nature of the puppy trade has rendered existing legislation and enforcement outdated and ineffective (e.g. fines are not proportionate to earnings, so do not act as a deterrent, and online traders are largely uncontrolled).

The study also revealed a lack of awareness and knowledge amongst consumers, who report feeling overwhelmed and confused by the scale of online sales. Rather than seeking advice from professionals though, many



place their trust in these advertisements, being reassured by the inclusion of licensing information and believing them to be well-regulated.

The report concludes that a united approach from within and outwith the UK is deemed necessary to tackle illegal importation, as weaknesses in one location (for example, the Irish and Northern Irish 'border') will negatively impact on the whole UK trade.

The full report can be found here:
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00527436.pdf>



Key priorities for policy & practice

Supply-related strategies

-  Ensure greater consistency and enforcement of legislative requirements.
-  Develop cross-agency collaboration and partnership to ensure consistency and share workload/resources.
-  Enhance traceability of dealers and dogs.
-  Tighten border checks on animals through better training of officials and greater regulation.
-  In respect of rescue dogs imported from abroad, the process should be non-profitable and involve both mandatory blood tests for all relevant diseases, and treatment of parasites, with a positive test prohibiting import.

Demand & consumer-related strategies

-  Educate the public on the puppy trade, highlighting who is profiting, and the underhand tactics some sellers employ.
-  Develop an evidence-based media campaign to enhance public awareness of the puppy trade, highlighting the consequences for dogs and the emotional and financial costs for families.
-  Ensure that the education campaign reaches geographical hotspots for the puppy trade (e.g. Glasgow).
-  Increase public knowledge of non-puppy trade dogs available in the UK and how to find them.
-  Develop a trusted-trader system for dog breeders.
-  Raise awareness of the importance of dog walking, training and socialisation activities.
-  Provide support for families coping with negative behaviours and health problems associated with puppy farm dogs.
-  Create an online information space, endorsed by all welfare organisations and UK governments, that can provide evidence-based information for the public about buying a dog and recognising signs of illegal trade, as well as advice and support on dog care and training.

Conference delegates agreed the following key priorities:

1. Improve the breeding of all pups, to ensure their welfare needs are met and they receive the socialisation and habituation they need. Ensure the breeding dogs are cared for appropriately.
2. Enforcement of the Pet Travel Scheme needs to be improved to ensure the risk of disease entering the country is minimised, and it is only used for its intended purpose.
3. Enhance public awareness of the illegal dog trade and how they may be perpetuating the problem by buying a dog without due attention, care and research. Media campaigns will help achieve this.
4. Ensure those who wish to buy or rehome a dog are well informed about the processes involved. This information should be simple and readily available to all.
5. Understand consumer motivation and how to alter current patterns of behaviour.

It was agreed that there should be development of a robust multi-dimensional strategy to tackle the problems associated with the illegal dog trade.

With this in mind, legislation needs to be clear on the roles and responsibilities of different agents.



What next?

The Scottish SPCA will continue to prioritise activities designed to disrupt the illegal puppy trade through:

- 🐾 Hosting a stakeholder meeting within the next few months to identify how suggested strategies can be implemented, in particular how a collaborative trusted website can be developed and marketed to the general public.
- 🐾 Working with partners when it comes to enforcement, in particular disrupting the trade at source.

🐾 Highlighting the effects and showcasing situations where trade has been disrupted.

🐾 To demonstrate clearly the research findings to consumers through, for example, use of infographics on what they may face if they purchase a puppy without knowing all the risks.

🐾 Continue raising awareness online using **#SayNoToPuppyDealers**

Key differences between puppies sourced from reputable breeders and those purchased through illegal trade

PUPPY FROM A REPUTABLE AND TRUSTED BREEDER	VS	PUPPY TRADE PUP
Has remained with its mother and litter-mates for the recommended period of time		Taken from its mum too early
Has been socialised with people and is not frightened by common household noises and activities		Has not been socialised with people or family life
Unlikely to demonstrate behavioural issues such as fear, anxiety and aggression		Is more likely to demonstrate behavioural issues such as fear, anxiety and aggression
Will be up-to-date with required vaccinations and treatment such as worming		Will not have had required vaccinations or treatments such as worming
Buyer will have had contact with seller and will have seen the parents and litter-mates		Buyer may not have had much contact with seller and may not have seen parents or litter-mates
Ongoing support will be provided by the seller with regard to training and any other concerns		Seller will not offer any support following purchase of the puppy and is unlikely to be contactable
Will be microchipped and have appropriate paperwork regarding ownership		Microchip/registration does not necessarily relate to where the pup was born
Puppy will be in good general health and may have a month of free pet insurance		Will most likely require veterinary treatment soon after arriving in their new home

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