

Friday 21 September 2012

To: Members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Dear Committee Member



Ref: The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012

As you will be aware, the above regulations are currently being discussed within the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 and Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) welcomed the opportunity to partake in the Committee Stakeholder Event which was held at Stormont on Tuesday 18 September, to discuss the proposed revised draft Regulations and Guidance for Council Enforcement Officers in respect of Dog Breeding Establishments Regulations.

Countryside Alliance Ireland represents nearly 4,000 people in Northern Ireland, with a large proportion breeding or owning dogs for recreational purposes. We would therefore like to emphasise that these regulations have the power to affect thousands of citizens.

At the outset, may we commend the Department and the Committee for many of the changes made from the initial responses to the consultation. However, there are a few issues CAI is still concerned with and we would like to bring these to your attention.

Countryside Alliance Ireland is supportive of the exemption for hunt clubs and charities; indeed, we think it is imperative that this remains within these regulations. We have recommended hunt clubs be exempt from *some* regulations; we do not want to place any doubt on the welfare of hounds, simply for it to be recognised that hounds and hunt club kennels are unique and therefore require practices which are substantially different to those of other dogs.

CAI, amongst others, believes it would be inappropriate and not in the best interests of animal welfare to devise common standards for hounds and hence believe an exemption is the only solution.

The primary purpose of these regulations is to cease the practice of 'puppy-farming'. Hunt clubs do not breed commercially or for monetary gain; they breed to keep bloodlines from extinction and to maintain pack size.

With an exemption in place, hunt clubs and charities would still be subject to scrutiny and welfare standards from the Hunting Association of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association and the Councils. The annual block licence issued to the hunts by the council ensures the kennels can be inspected by the dog warden at any time.

Animal welfare is the priority and whilst we do not feel hunt clubs should be subject to all requirements of a dog breeding establishment, the animal welfare standards within them should be maintained at a high level.

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Registered hunt clubs throughout Northern Ireland have complied with the Dogs (Amendment) Act and the micro-chipping regulations therein. Registered hunts strive to maintain the highest welfare standards and provide accountability for their actions and the upkeep of their hounds.

In addition, CAI supports the recommendations made by the Welfare of Animals Act Team regarding mating regulations. We believe condition 8 should remain as published within the revised proposals that will allow the breeding of three litters in three years and the breeding of a bitch after the age of 8 years, on condition that on each occasion a veterinary surgeon will certify that the bitch is in good health to breed.

The greyhound industry throughout Ireland is a thriving and successful industry and many trainers and breeders reside in Northern Ireland and therefore contribute significantly to the economy.

CAI is fully committed to animal welfare which we take very seriously. We promote and expect the highest of standards of animal welfare in all of our rural activities, and also with ensuring that our members and the country sports community are not unduly penalised and hampered in the undertaking of their legitimate activities.

We are pleased to be working with the Department and the Committee to improve Dog Breeding Establishments and animal welfare in Northern Ireland and we would appreciate the opportunity to brief the Committee in respect of the issues we have raised.

In the meantime, if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us on 028 9263 9911.

Yours sincerely



Chief Executive

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