

Dog Breeding Establishments- Stakeholder Event

Group 2

Issue 1: Block Licenses

Prices

It was felt that:

- If the fee is too high it will drive dog breeders out of the system
- £32.50 fee should be applied all round to encourage everyone into the system

Scale of fees

The following points were made by participants:

- At the moment the fees favour larger breeding establishments
- Fees for a large establishment with 200 bitches and therefore 200 litters per year is £350 or £1.75 per litter, yet a breeder of 3 litters per year paying £150 works out at £50 per litter –a gross distortion encouraging mass production of puppies and penalising small hobby breeders.
- If too low/punitive for large establishments- could encourage mass production
- Should be more for larger establishments to cover the inspections required for them, and less for smaller establishments.
- A sliding scale of fees needed
- The fee scale would be better if it was based on the number of litters produced rather than the number of bitches kept in the establishment.

E.g.) Looked at the case in the south where it was highlighted that a high scale of fees is driving breeders out of the system, resulting in the use of underground methods and the farming out of dogs to bring numbers down etc.

South have separate regulations for greyhounds- pay a flat fee of 100 euro/yr .

Puppy farms versus large breeding establishments

Members clarified that puppy farms put health and welfare second to profit making – that high production is not a definition of a puppy farm, therefore not all large establishments can be classed as puppy farms.

It was explained that mass dog breeding emanated from Wales due to foot and mouth where farming/breeding of other species was encouraged to compensate – therefore dog breeding was encouraged.

Issue 2: Exemptions

The general feeling was that there should not be any exemptions to the regulations:

- Anyone coming under the regulations should not be exempt, including hunting kennels
- Anyone involved in breeding should have to meet common welfare standards/inspection, including all charities
- However it was suggested that there should be a reduced fee for charities

Definition

It was brought to light that as most charities neuter their dogs they don't actually fall under the definition of a breeding establishment – therefore needs revised

Inspections

It was suggested that in order to get a license, the establishment should get a stamp of approval from a vet –as vets tend to see establishments and the conditions of their dogs on a regular basis.

Some participants suggested the idea of vets performing the inspection for the issuing of a license – should be DARD vets who perform this to ensure they are independent from the establishment, rather than enforcement officers from councils (who would need additional specialised training which costs money)

GB Welfare of Greyhounds Regulations

- It was felt that similar proposals should be included in the revised NI regulations where there is an exemption for UCAS (accreditation body/ board) accredited establishments from the regulations.
- Or the accreditation body should share information they already have with local councils, therefore not taking the responsibility away from local councils.
- In England an inspection scheme was enacted which is independent from government.
- All English regulations for greyhounds do not apply to NI, RoI have regulation for greyhounds- therefore it was suggested there should be a section in the regulations for greyhounds/gaming dogs in the draft NI regulations.

Issue 3: Mating and Limitations

Breeding age

- It was brought to light that the definition suggests the minimum breeding age for a bitch is 6 months, yet later in the regulations it refers to 12months – therefore clarity is needed.
- It was agreed by participants that the minimum age should be 12 months and 18 months for large breeds as they tend to take longer to mature.

- This was compared to the minimum age for greyhounds in the south being 15 months.

Neutering

Draft regulations propose that a bitch should be neutered by the breeding establishment once it has finished breeding and is being re-homed:

- It was felt that instead of paying the cost of neutering, unscrupulous breeders could have the bitch euthanized to save money (was suggested it can cost £100-£150 for neutering)
- Could encourage putting dogs to sleep early
- It was asked whether there could be any form of government assistance/subsidy to help with fees – or should the annual fee go towards this?
- It was felt that a clause is needed for the welfare of dogs finished breeding – the issue with this was how to enforce it
- Some participants suggested something similar to the tracking system used for livestock.

Number of litters

Some participants agreed that the change in the regulation to 3 litters in 3 months is very poor welfare as it does not allow for the necessary recovery time needed by the bitch.

It was felt by a participant that changes were made to the regulation due to the commercial interest of greyhounds.

Participants looked at the situation in the south for greyhounds and how it might affect greyhounds in the north - in the south bitches can mate from 15 months with a maximum of 6 litters, and can have an additional 2 litters subject to vet approval. Risk that high end greyhounds could be exported to the south to get the extra litters.

Alignment of legislation with other jurisdictions

The point was made that variation in what constitutes a breeding establishment and therefore a license could encourage the movement of breeding bitches across jurisdictions to circumvent the NI regulation of 3 litters/yr in comparison to the south with 6 litters/yr, and England/Scotland with 5 litters/yr.