

ARD Committee

Dog Breeding Establishments Stakeholder consultation event

Breakout Group 3

Group 3 looked at the following 3 issues:

- Microchipping;
- Guidance for Enforcement Officers; and
- Suspensions, revoking a licence and Appeal Procedure.

Issue 1 – Microchipping

The view was expressed by many participants that microchipping was a good thing as it would help to address the straying issue and could also improve the image of dog breeders as being responsible and interested in the welfare of the dogs they breed.

Some participants had concerns around the fact that microchipping was not currently a legal requirement in England, and that as a result questioned whether Northern Ireland should be imposing legislation on England.

There was also concern around microchipping effectively making dogs from here as Irish/Northern Irish and the suggestion that this would have a stigma for dogs from here sent to GB, which could actually impact negatively on the welfare of unwanted dogs.

As a counter to the previous point the view was expressed that England has higher welfare standards than Northern Ireland and that microchip usage is widespread within England despite not being a legal requirement, and that the primary function of microchips is traceability.

Some participants questioned whether opposition to microchipping from breeders was really about stigmatising dogs or had more to do with the issue of cost to the breeder.

There was recognition from all participants of the issue of registering the details associated with a microchip – particularly in ensuring that people who buy a dog from a breeder change the details.

At present it costs £15 to change the registration details as the breeder is the first registered keeper. Who should bear this cost? Should it be a requirement for the new owners? There was some discussion as to whether dog buyers will pay the £15 fee to change the registration details and a further debate, but no

consensus, around whether the breeder should meet his cost given that they may be making £300-£400 from the sale of the dog.

A further suggestion was also made with regard to the keeping of a registration book that would accompany a dog throughout its lifetime, such as that used for greyhounds.

Issue 2 – Guidance for Enforcement Officers

There was a broad welcome from some participants for the changes that had been made to the guidance, but an ongoing feeling that there was a need for dog breeding to not be focussed on paperwork. The ROI animal welfare standards and guidelines were cited as working well without the same requirements as being proposed for Northern Ireland.

Some participants questioned whether the ROI was a good example to follow given documented issues animal welfare.

Some participants had concerns that the guidelines could have an adverse effect on animal welfare and may well lead people to hide dogs. The question was raised as to how hobby breeders or small businesses will meet the standards.

There was a feeling that the standards/guidance and its enforcement should increase the image of dogs bred in Northern Ireland and should help to put disreputable breeders out of business. The point was also made by some stakeholders that most reputable breeders would be doing many of the things required in the guidelines already.

There was some discussion around the need to differentiate between owners of working dogs or breeders, as the focus for the guidance appeared to be on pet dogs – why would this be needed for working dogs?

There was also much discussion around what the guidelines actually were – were they enforceable standards? This issue was explored in reference to the guidance surrounding the “creation of a home environment”, with participants asking what this meant. The DARD official clarified that the guidelines were just that, guidance and as such were there to be interpreted by inspectors, but that there would be provision for breeders to work with the councils on how the guidance was interpreted and implemented.

Issue 3 - Suspensions, revoking a licence and Appeal Procedure;

There was consensus that the recourse to council prior to court was a welcome development.

There was also a suggestion that the adoption of time bound improvement notices – such as those used in ROI should be explored further.

A view was also expressed that if the legislation was right the issues of suspension, revocation and appeals would take care of themselves.

Other Issues

- **Definition of a breeding establishment-** a cause for concern. There can be exceptional circumstances which can lead to exceeding the 3 litters rule. Would have been better to set the limit at 4. The view was expressed that there was a need for a common limit for NI, ROI and GB – possibly of 5 litters;
- **Shouldn't be any exemptions for the regulations** – the issue is animal welfare;
- **Exemptions should continue to exist for hunt kennels;**
- **Any breeder with more than 1 bitch should be viewed as a commercial breeder;**
- **Hobby breeders are being forced down the road of either becoming commercial breeders or hiding litters;**
- **The fees will lead to people hiding dogs;**
- **Legislation will impact on those who will comply – but doesn't impact on those who will continue to operate outside the law;**
- **Are show breeders able to comply with the regulations – the focus is on commercial premises;**
- **Licence fee moves from £32 to £150 – disparity in scale – should have explore the idea of cost per breeding bitch. This may not however work as the definition of a breeding bitch is awkward, as any bitch may not have puppies;**
- **Ongoing issue of overbred female dogs** – 6 breeding litters over a lifetime is too much;
- **Legislation should be restored to a restriction of 1 litter in 12 months;**