

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: ANIMAL WELFARE (IMPORT OF DOGS, CATS AND FERRETS) BILL

Second Reading, House of Commons – Dr Danny Chambers MP

Friday 29 November 2024

- **The Countryside Alliance fully supports this Bill as a straightforward measure to improve animal welfare. We urge politicians of all parties to support it and cooperate in securing its passage.**
- **In the last Parliament, a similar Bill under the same title attracted cross-party support. It received a Second Reading but fell at dissolution prior to the General Election.**
- **This Bill seeks to clamp down on the smuggling of dogs, cats and ferrets. It would ban the import of puppies and kittens under six months and dogs and cats that are mutilated or heavily pregnant, and also reduce the number of animals that can travel into Great Britain under non-commercial rules originally introduced when we were in the European Union.**
- **We believe that this Bill will help reduce current abuse of the non-commercial pet movement system, which allows, in particular, the import of low-welfare puppies into the country.**
- **There has been only one substantive change in this Bill: a new clause on pre-testing to avoid diseases such as rabies and *brucella canis* becoming endemic in the UK.**
- **We would expect exemptions introduced by regulations to include pet animals being moved into Great Britain for the purpose of participating in competitions, exhibitions or sporting events, or in training for such events.**

Background

- **The measures in this Bill arose in the previous government's abortive Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. While some of the measures in that Bill attracted controversy as a result of extraneous amendments, this section was supported by all parties and, to our knowledge, relevant stakeholders.**
- **Following the failure of the Kept Animals Bill the previous government sought to introduce its measures separately, both directly in its own legislation and through hand-out Private Members' Bills.**

- One of these, the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill 2023-24¹, was brought by Selaine Saxby, the former MP for North Devon. It received its Second Reading on 15 March after receiving cross-party support.²
- Subsequently, on the dissolution of Parliament prior to the General Election the Bill was lost.

Purpose and content

- This Bill seeks to clamp down on the smuggling of dogs, cats and ferrets. It would ban the import of puppies and kittens under six months and dogs and cats that are mutilated or heavily pregnant. It would also reduce the number of animals that can travel into Great Britain under non-commercial rules from five per person to five per vehicle, or three per foot or air passenger.
- By doing so it aims to address the issue of commercial imports being disguised as non-commercial movements by changing the rules that govern the non-commercial movements of dogs, cats and ferrets into Great Britain from third countries to make it more difficult and less profitable for traders fraudulently to import animals for sale under the pretence of being owners travelling with their pets.
- The Bill allows for relevant exemptions to the prohibitions, for example, for recognised assistance dogs or military or service working animals, to be delivered through regulations.

Changes from the 2022-23 Bill

- While at the time of writing this Bill had yet to be published, we understand from liaison with Dr Chambers' office that there has been only one substantive change in this Bill from that which received its Second Reading in March.
- That change is an additional clause on pre-testing to avoid diseases such as rabies and *brucella canis* becoming endemic in the UK. It would require, prior to entry into the UK, appropriate testing for diseases which are endemic in the country of origin or regular residency of the animal but are not currently endemic here, as determined by Defra, the Animal and Plant Health Agency or a relevant authority.
- We are told that this new clause would apply only to animals of foreign origin. It would not impose new obligations on legitimate UK-based pet owners who have been abroad with their pet and are travelling home on a UK-issued pet passport. The issuing country of the pet passport on which the animal is travelling will be the primary determinant of origin or residency.
- The only other change in this Bill is the correction of a typographical error.

Countryside Alliance position

- The Countryside Alliance fully supports this Bill as a straightforward measure to improve animal welfare. We urge politicians of all parties to support it and co-operate in securing its passage.

¹ UK Parliament, [Animal Welfare \(Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets\) Bill 2023-24](#)

² Commons Hansard, [Animal Welfare \(Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets\) Bill](#), 15.03.24

- We believe that this Bill will help reduce current abuse of the non-commercial pet movement system, which allows, in particular, the import of low-welfare puppies into the country.
- We also welcome that the Bill will prohibit the import of puppies under six months old, heavily pregnant bitches and those which have been subject to mutilations that would not have been lawful here, subject to necessary and sensible exceptions.
- We were initially concerned that there was a risk that the new clause on pre-testing might impose new obligations on legitimate UK-based pet owners, but the assurance that it would not apply to holders of a UK-issued pet passport answers that objection.
- We would expect the exemptions introduced by regulations, as provided for in the Bill, to include pet animals being moved into Great Britain for the purpose of participating in competitions, exhibitions or sporting events, or in training for such events.

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