



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Simon Hoare MP
Chairman, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
House of Commons
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18 February 2021

Dear Simon,

You wrote to Justin Tomlinson on 15 January regarding the movement of young assistance dogs between Great Britain (GB) and Northern Ireland (NI) which had been raised with you in connection with your current Inquiry. I am replying as my Department has responsibility for this issue.

The conditions which apply to pet movements from GB to NI, including the movement of assistance dogs, are governed by the rules of the EU Pet Travel Scheme. Following the end of the Transition Period, new rules apply to the movement of pets travelling from GB to NI including with regard to documentation and health preparations.

We will continue to press the EU Commission in relation to securing Part 1 listed status, recognising that achieving this would alleviate some of the new requirements for pet owners and assistance dog users travelling to the EU and to Northern Ireland. We are clear that we meet all the animal health requirements for this and we have one of the most rigorous pet checking regimes in Europe to protect our biosecurity.

Defra has been clear that there are no animal-health or biosecurity justifications for these additional rules. I share the concerns highlighted in your letter on the undue impact these requirements will have on the formative training and socialisation of young assistance dogs. The new pet travel requirements mean that in practice assistance dog puppies may no longer be moved from GB to NI at eight weeks of age. Whilst assistance dog puppies older than 15 weeks could move from GB to NI, I appreciate that in practice unless they are moved at eight weeks of age they are likely to be raised over their next 12 months in GB. However, once this initial upbringing stage is complete, assistance dogs may still move to NI for their formal training, and fully trained assistance dogs (trained in NI or outside of NI) may still be partnered with new NI owners.

In order to travel to the EU and Northern Ireland, users of recognised assistance dogs must ensure that the dog is accompanied by an animal health certificate unless the dog has been issued with a pet passport in an EU country or Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, there are no derogations in the EU Pet Travel regulations for assistance dogs and I appreciate the additional burden and costs to frequent travellers is unfair and unwelcome.



The Government is engaging with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to explore means to streamline pet travel between the UK and Ireland, recognising the high standards of animal health that the UK and Ireland share and the undue burden the new regulations places on the movements of assistance dogs. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has also written to the European Vice-President about developing an agreement which addresses the barriers imposed on pet travel between GB, NI and the Republic of Ireland.

We are proactively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements from GB to the EU and to NI. We will continue to work closely with the assistance dog sector, including Guide Dogs, on these issues.

You may wish to note that, in the meantime, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland have recently published guidance on a pragmatic enforcement approach to pets entering from Great Britain. Pets entering from Great Britain will not be subject to routine checks until July 2021. From 1 July pet owners and authorised persons will be required to present their pet (or assistance dog) for inspection. DAERA guidance can be found at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/travelling-pets#toc-1>.

I wish to thank you once again for writing on this important matter.



RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP