

## **Written evidence submitted by Northumbria University Newcastle (PS0001)**

3 November 2020

To the EFRA Select Committee - companion animal welfare

RE: Evidence regarding the issue of the smuggling of puppies, kittens and other companion animals

Thank you for the invitation to submit evidence regarding the issue of smuggling of puppies, kittens and other companion animals. There are two different elements to this issue: first, domestic companion animals (e.g. dogs, cats, rabbits and others) are regulated by certain legislation. Second, non-domesticated companion animals (some birds, reptiles, arachnids and others) are regulated by different legislation to domesticated companion animals (i.e. COTES implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). I will focus on the former as the aim of this consultation appears not to address wildlife trade as such.

The study that I led for the Scottish Government and DEFRA (Wyatt et al 2017) 'Scoping Research on the Illegal Importation and Farming of Puppies' found that we do not know the extent of puppy smuggling (or of other domesticated companion animals). It is estimated that 800,000 to 1.3 million puppies are sold each year in the UK. This number cannot be met by the dog population in the country and the known legal imports do not match this figure. Thus, it is fairly safe to suggest that there is a significant amount of smuggling of puppies (and other companion animals) into the UK. Research by the Dogs Trust (2018), as well as my study, indicate that the puppies are coming from Ireland, Hungary and Lithuania. It is important to note, however, that this is a changing landscape. The Eurogroup for Animals event in April of 2020 presented evidence of shifting patterns of breeding and smuggling in Eastern Europe. From my personal network of scholars in Eastern Europe, I know there is a significant lack of knowledge about puppy breeding and smuggling in Poland, Ukraine and Russia (the latter is problematic since Russia is thought to have the highest dog ownership in Europe (FEDIAF (2020))).

The reason that there is not a better understanding stems from:

- The lack of a single database containing all microchip numbers for companion animals

- The loophole in PETS that allows for five individual companion animals per person, which facilitates unrecorded and unregulated commercial sales rather than the intended purpose of personal companions
- Limited capacity at the borders to search for and uncover smuggled puppies
- Delegation of checks and inspections to private transport and travel companies, which prioritise speed of movement over public safety and animal welfare
- Online advertisements of puppies that mislead consumers to think the puppies are coming from reputable, high welfare breeders or do not have enough information to determine where the puppies are coming from

With the increased demand in companion animals during the pandemic, there is undoubtedly impacts to the smuggling of puppies and other companion animals. Again, we do not know the full extent of these impacts, and urgent research should be undertaken to gain more information, but there is likely to be a ramping up of puppy farming, reduced welfare and more smuggling to meet the increased demand. Enforcement is limited at the best of times, so is likely to be even more inadequate with the strain on human and financial resources in the current situation.

Lucy's Law and the "Petfished" campaign supporting the law's implementation are welcome developments. Third party retailers have posed problems, so their elimination from the market will be an improvement. However, these new developments need to be supported by a robust registration and inspection regime of breeders to ensure legitimacy and welfare standards. This means more funding and human resources to Local Authorities for them to implement this system and undertake these checks.

If possible, post-Brexit, the UK should remain within the EU's PETS scheme, but with further restrictions to combat the scheme's misuse by commercial breeders. Lowering a person's allowance of personal pets travelling with them to two or only allowing three pets per vehicle will help to close this loophole. Further restrictions could be to raise the minimum age of traveling pets to six months or higher. In addition, the scheme should be linked to a database similar to that for livestock in the EU. All movement—in and out of each country and every trip—should be tracked through the companion animals' microchip.

The charitable sector is crucial to companion animal welfare even outside of COVID-19. If possible, charities should be financially supported to continue to carry out their essential duties of providing housing and care for companion animals as well as assisting government agencies with inspections and confiscations (i.e. RSPCA, SSPCA). In addition, the charitable sector should re-visit their adoption protocols, so they are not inadvertently contributing to puppy smuggling. By having overly strict adoption criteria, charities sometimes drive consumers to get puppies because they are not able to adopt. This risks people buying from puppy farms or unintentionally

from smuggled sources. This may prove to be particularly relevant as it is predicted that shelters might receive large numbers of companion animals in the coming months. People who cannot cope with taking care of their companion animals or become unable to afford to keep their pets, may well start giving them to rescues and shelters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. My report, listed below, contains additional recommendations. As a nation of animal lovers, I encourage the UK Government to continue to improve the lives of companion animals. There is much research still to be done particularly during this challenging time where companion animals are central to many people's lives.

Kind regards,

Dr Tanya Wyatt

### References

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