



Royal  
Kennel  
Club

# The Dog People's Manifesto

Calling on the incoming  
Government to help the  
nation's dog owners be able  
to acquire healthy dogs and  
care for their pets better





## **Introduction from Stuart Payne, the Convenor of The Scottish Kennel Club (SKC)**

I'm a dog person and have lived with dogs my whole life. I am not unique; over a quarter of adults living in Scotland have a pet dog. It is imperative that the benefits of dog ownership continue to be enjoyed and the history of Scotland as a 'dog loving country' is maintained. Dog ownership has a huge positive impact on the mental health of all, from older to younger alike, of those who may otherwise be marginalised in society, as well as those who may be lonely, and encourages physical activity due to regular walking.

# Breeding

It is our view that the key to improving how dogs are bred is to encourage those who love dogs to responsibly breed from their family pets in their own home – the hobby breeder has been the mainstay of Scottish dog breeding for the last 150 years.

We believe the Scottish Regulations, The Animal Welfare Licensing of Activities Including Animals (Scotland) Regulations 2021 currently strike a sensible balance as they do not incorporate a confusing and burdensome business test which makes the Regulations far more straightforward i.e. anybody breeding 3 litters per year or more requires a dog breeding licence. We also welcome the Code of Practice which is under development which should encourage more consideration and research on the part of the puppy buyer to ensure they acquire a puppy suitable for their lifestyle and are better informed as to ask breeders the right questions.

In contrast we have learned from England that imposing two tests on dog breeders in the form of a litter threshold and a business test, to ascertain whether they require a license to breed has been complex and confusing for breeders and local authorities alike. We believe that the business test element of this has resulted in a dwindling supply of dogs from high-welfare, low-volume breeders and that as a result, illegal high-volume puppy farmers, with poor husbandry and lack of care, plus European importers, are filling the gap in the market to the detriment of the long-term health and welfare of pet dogs. We have further concerns about imports addressed in the next section.



Whilst other organisations may call for the litter licensing threshold to reduce in Scotland, or for there to be a greater regulatory burden placed on ultra-low volume breeders breeding one or two litters per year or fewer, we would urge the incoming Government to:

- Work closely with the dog breeding community prior to imposing regulatory changes which could have unintended consequences. High welfare dog breeding is very much a cottage industry which is not motivated by financial gain. On the contrary it is an increasingly expensive hobby and passion of those with an interest in dogs to ensure the future health and welfare of their chosen breed.
- Consider non-regulatory means to encourage people to breed from pet dogs in a home environment in order that the demand for healthy puppies can be met domestically. For example:
  - To invest in behaviour change campaigns to encourage people to purchase puppies from breeders who meet the Royal Kennel Club's Health and Welfare Standard
  - Establish a mentoring programme to pair experienced and inexperienced breeders
  - To better encourage the use of puppy contracts

# Importing puppies - imports of cats, dogs and ferrets' regulations

At the time of writing, we have further concerns about potential unintended consequences of the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill which is likely to soon receive Royal Assent and will apply across the UK.

We welcome the Bill as we have grave concerns about the circumstances in which large numbers of puppies are imported illegally in poor conditions and with health and socialisation issues – and the inevitable impact on rescue organisations because of poor breeding. However, we work with a community of breeders, who, for reasons pertaining to widening the gene pool within their chosen breed, and breeding away from breed specific health conditions, do import puppies younger than 6 months old. However, they will only ever import a single puppy at a time, and most will import only one puppy per year (or even less frequently). They import the puppy when they are young as it's vital to their socialisation and future behaviour that they are with their new owner at as close to 20 weeks of age as possible.

The Royal Kennel Club and the Scottish Kennel Club actively encourage breeders to look at inbreeding coefficients prior to breeding to ensure that the long-term health and welfare of the breed is prioritised. If those who currently expend great effort and expense (totalling thousands of pounds), to do so by way of importing are no longer able to, we would be concerned about an increase in genetic health related problems particularly within numerically smaller breeds, as demand for puppies could then be met by low welfare and commercially driven breeders who have less regard for breeding away from certain health defects.

We are therefore calling on an incoming Government to work with Defra on the detail of the Regulations with a view to ensuring that the permit scheme (which is embedded in the Bill) is available for use by breeders who can demonstrate a genuine need, from a genetic diversity perspective, to be permitted to import a single young dog under six months of age per year. We believe this could be readily achieved without creating unwanted loopholes, especially because importing for commercial gain requires the transportation of as many puppies as possible per vehicle – one puppy per year would not be profitable by any means.

# Brachycephalic/flat-faced dogs such as Pugs, Bulldogs and French Bulldogs

Whilst there is a lot of criticism of how flat-faced dogs have been bred, it is their popularity amongst the dog-owning public, made worse by advertisement agencies and social media, that has exacerbated poor breeding practices. While demand for them may have now peaked and is in a clear decline, the Royal Kennel Club still register a high number of these breeds, and their health and welfare remain a key priority of our work. In 2016 we established the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), the first of its kind, comprising the Royal Kennel Club along with academic, veterinary, and welfare bodies, as well as government officials and breed clubs. The objective of the BWG is a world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the brachycephalic conformation. The strapline of the group is 'stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog', but this messaging alone is not enough.

The Scottish Kennel Club recognise that instead of just highlighting the risks of owning a typically brachycephalic dog, we also need to ensure they can be bred with an emphasis on their health and welfare so would-be owners can obtain a healthy example of the breed they desire. This is why the Royal Kennel Club have invested significant resource into the development of the internationally recognised University of Cambridge/Royal Kennel Club Respiratory Function Grading scheme; the only scheme which assesses a dog's breathing and provides a grade which advises as to whether it should be bred from.

We are calling on the incoming Government to help people ensure their dogs live happy healthy lives by encouraging and educating breeders and puppy buyers on the advantages of the Respiratory Function Grading scheme and its importance for the health and welfare of their chosen dog breeds. Further information about the scheme can be found here [Respiratory Function Grading Scheme | Royal Kennel Club](#)



# Dangerous dogs and XL Bully dogs

The Scottish Kennel Club were disappointed at the addition of the XL Bully dog to the dangerous dogs list under the antiquated and discredited Dangerous Dogs Act, which has proved time and again to be an ineffective mechanism in preventing dog attacks and fatalities. The ban has caused anxiety and frustration amongst owners of dogs who may fit the very broad description of what an XL Bully is, as it is not a Royal Kennel Club registered breed with a breed standard. We believe it would be beneficial for an incoming Government to work on more effective preventive strategies that targets the root causes of dangerous dog incidents—irresponsible ownership, poor training. We are calling on an incoming Government to:

- **Push for a review of the law and data surrounding dog incidents** - to move towards a system that records incidents clearly, holds irresponsible owners accountable, and protects the public based on evidence.
- **Promote responsible dog ownership** – including working in partnership with police, local authorities and the third sector to ensure they have the powers and resources to act early - educating, supporting, and where necessary, intervening with dog owners to prevent problems before they escalate.

It is further our view that dog owner licensing would not be an effective solution to deal with this issue. Read more in our [dog licensing report](#).



# Electric shock collars

It is widely accepted that the use of electric shock collars to train dogs is not only detrimental to animal welfare but is, in fact, totally unnecessary<sup>1</sup>. This is the combined view of all major animal welfare organisations, leading dog training organisations and UK and European veterinary bodies. With no specific legislation around dog training, it is even more imperative that people are not 'duped' into using these devices.

Right up until the election there remained widespread support from the Scottish public and cross party MSPs for a ban, and the independent Scottish Animal Welfare Commission also recommended a complete ban on their usage. Despite this, in April 2025 the Scottish Government announced it would go out to consultation once again and at the time of writing, no date has been set for moving the consultation forward. We very much hope this pressing issue will be picked up by the Scottish Government swiftly following the election. According to UK wide polls, around 80 percent of people agree that remote controlled devices emitting electric shocks to train dogs should be banned and 95 percent of dog owners train their dogs without them.

We are calling on an incoming Government to ban the use of electric shock collars used to train pet dogs in Scotland at the earliest convenience, to mirror what the law is already in Wales.

***As an organisation which invests entirely in improving the health and welfare of dogs and working with responsible breeders, we very much look forward to working with the incoming Government.***

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1 [Electronic Collars Less Effective than Reward-based Training, Research Finds | News and Press \(lincoln.ac.uk\)](#)





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