

SICK PUPPY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PUPPY TRAFFICKING TRADE IN LONDON



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pets Travel Scheme (PETS) enables dog, cat or ferret owners to travel within the EU with their pet without the need for quarantine on arrival providing they have been microchipped, hold a pet passport, have been vaccinated against rabies and that any dogs entering the UK have received tapeworm treatment directly prior to travel.¹ Although it seems a godsend for pet owners wishing to travel between countries, sadly it has had some unintended consequences.

- Dogs Trust have uncovered evidence of the scheme being misused by puppy traffickers on a large scale to import poorly bred puppies destined for commercial sale in this country.²
- The Blue Cross have used information provided by Gumtree, the popular classified advertising website, who are able to track repeat advertisers by looking at the phone numbers and device IDs used to place the adverts. According to the Blue Cross, of a sample of 104 repeat advertisers, 28 were advertising dogs / puppies from London postcodes. These postcodes were situated across all 32 London boroughs. The largest user was using 133 email accounts, linked to 834 dog ads over a 24 month period. This was across 158 postcodes and 42 councils – 28 of which were London boroughs.
- According to a Dogs Trust investigation, *“Six vets in Lithuania and Hungary admitted falsifying the information on pet passports and fifteen breeders or dealers we met in both countries confirmed they regularly transport underage puppies into the UK.”*³
- Many of these animals have been taken from their mothers too soon, are bred in unhygienic conditions and suffer from diseases that only manifest themselves after they have been sold, when the sellers are long-gone and uncontactable.
- According to the RSPCA: The “cute” factor, seems to be at its strongest between the ages of six and 16 weeks. As puppies are at their most marketable at this age this invariably means the seller has a very short time period to sell the puppy.⁴
- The City of London Corporation is responsible for ensuring legislative compliance for imported animals into the whole of Greater London.⁵ In a response to a Freedom of Information request asking how many cases of puppies illegally imported from abroad under PETS and sold to their parties had been reported between 2012 and 2016, we were informed that 31 cases had been reported and 46 puppies had been detained. Most animals came from central and eastern Europe. Of the 31 cases 12 (38%) originated in Lithuania, 4 (12.9%) each in Poland and Hungary, 3 in Romania (9.6%).⁶
- A recent prosecution by the Metropolitan Police in London highlighted the case of puppies illegally imported from Romania.⁷

1. <https://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview>

2. P25 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

3. P2 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

4. P9 <https://rompetid.ro/files/downloads/utile/PuppyTradeReport-2015.pdf>

5. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/animal-health-welfare/animal-health/Pages/default.aspx>

6. Fol reponse 28 June 2017

7. <http://www.lbc.co.uk/news/london/north/man-who-illegally-imported-puppies-from-romania-ba/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the misuse of PETS to import very young puppies for sale is extremely lucrative, we believe that there need to be measures which would cut the profit on such deals. If the profits are greatly reduced there would no longer be any incentive to misuse the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION #1 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that the PETS Scheme be amended to permit only 5 animals per vehicle rather than 5 per person up to the current limit of 3 persons with possible waivers for bona fide breeders travelling to established dog shows. This would limit the financial incentives to trafficking.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that that no dog or cat under the age of 6 months be permitted to enter the country under PETS. This would be a disincentive to breeders as it would mean they would have to feed and support an animal for a much longer period cutting any profit. Also at 6 months an animal is past the "cuddly" stage and therefore not as easy to sell.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that rabies testing and tick treatments be reintroduced with a wait period of at least 30 days after the date of vaccination and for there then to be a 3 month wait period before the pet animal is moved between countries. In addition to the disease limitation factor this would also be a financial disincentive.

INTRODUCTION

We are a nation of animal lovers and many households own a pet dog or cat. A companion animal is particularly attractive to those who live by themselves. Most people prefer to purchase a puppy rather than an adult dog because of the appeal of a cuddly small animal. Sadly, some purchasers are deceived into buying puppies from on-line dealers selling trafficked animals brought in from abroad, particularly eastern Europe, under the PETS Scheme.

The Pets Travel Scheme (PETS) brought in in 2012 enables dog, cat or ferret owners to travel within the EU with their pet without the need for quarantine on arrival providing they have been microchipped, hold a pet passport, have been vaccinated against rabies and that any dogs entering the UK have received tapeworm treatment directly prior to travel.⁸

Many of these animals have been taken from their mothers too soon, are bred in unhygienic conditions and suffer from diseases that only manifest themselves after they have been sold, when the sellers are long-gone and uncontactable. New owners, frequently with low incomes, find themselves with seriously ill pets with pre-existing conditions, needing expensive veterinary treatment and with no possibility of insurance cover. Some are faced with the possibility of being forced to put their pet down because of the severity of its condition or because they cannot afford treatment.⁹

8. <https://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview>

9. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/my-poor-little-nacho-died-7383195>

EVIDENCE

According to the RSPCA:

The "cute" factor, which seems to be at its strongest between the ages of six and 16 weeks. As puppies are at their most marketable at this age this invariably means the seller has a very short time period to sell the puppy.¹⁰

Dogs Trust have uncovered evidence of the scheme being misused by puppy traffickers on a large scale to import poorly bred puppies destined for commercial sale in this country.¹¹ A maximum of 5 dogs per person dogs can be imported in this way meaning that if three people are in a vehicle 15 can be imported on one occasion.¹²

The Blue Cross have used information provided by Gumtree, the popular classified advertising website, who are able to track repeat advertisers by looking at the phone numbers and device IDs used to place the adverts. According to the Blue Cross, of a sample of 104 repeat advertisers, 28 were advertising dogs / puppies from London postcodes. These postcodes were situated across all 32 London boroughs. The largest user was using 133 email accounts, linked to 834 dog ads over a 24 month period. This was across 158 postcodes and 42 councils – 28 of which were London boroughs.

The City of London Corporation is responsible for ensuring legislative compliance for imported animals into the whole of Greater London.¹³ In a response to a Freedom of Information request asking how many cases of puppies illegally imported from abroad under PETS and sold to their parties had been reported between 2012 and 2016, we were informed that 31 cases had been reported and 46 puppies had been detained. Most of these animals came from eastern Europe. Of the 31 cases 12 (38%) originated in Lithuania, 4 (12.9%) each in Poland and Hungary, 3 in Romania (9.6%).¹⁴

A recent prosecution by the Metropolitan Police in London highlighted the case of puppies illegally imported from Romania.¹⁵

Sharon Edwards, the City of London Animal Health Inspector said to us:

"Since the Pet Travel Scheme rule changes at the beginning of 2012, our officers have seen a significant rise and detention of puppies that have be brought to the UK illegally from Eastern Europe to be sold via internet adverts.

"Evidence shows that there is a substantial financial gain to be made in the illegal sale of these puppies, with their value being a fraction in their countries of birth compared with the prices that they can be sold for in the UK.

"The penalties imposed in the UK are often low and consequently so is the risk to the sellers and imports of these puppies."

10. P9 <https://rompetid.ro/files/downloads/utile/PuppyTradeReport-2015.pdf>

11. P25 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

12. P25 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

13. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/animal-health-welfare/animal-health/Pages/default.aspx>

14. Fol reponse 28 June 2017

15. <http://www.lbc.co.uk/news/london/north/man-who-illegally-imported-puppies-from-romania-ba/>

IMPORTATION CONTROLS

Before 2012 Ireland was the main exporting country. According to the RSPCA's report, Sold a Pup? Exposing the breeding, trade and sale of puppies:

Trade patterns have changed markedly in the past five years. Prior to 2012, Ireland was seen as the main exporting country for puppies to the UK. It had cheap land, gave subsidies to breeders and is close to the large UK market with little regulation on the intra-country trade. In 2012, the UK law on non-commercial trade in dogs was changed to make it simpler for dog owners to move their animals around Europe, for instance to dog shows or when they go on holiday. The RSPCA suspects this also provided an opportunity for puppy dealers to exploit this new trade opportunity and government data appears to support this. In 2012 declared imports of dogs from Hungary increased on the previous year by 450 percent, from Romania by 1,150 percent and from Lithuania by 507 percent. As Figures 2 and 3 show, the imports of dogs under commercial and non-commercial rules continued to see large increases in 2015. Imports of dogs from Romania and Lithuania rose by 7,700 percent and 852 percent respectively in the four years since 2011 in the non-commercial trade in dogs. Although data is not centrally collected, it is thought that commercial breeding establishments in all these countries took this opportunity to increase their market to the UK and this trade is assumed to be from certain countries, concentrated on puppies and those of certain breeds. Increases in imports of puppies from these countries has also been seen in other major European markets such as Belgium.¹⁶

The Dogs Trust report states that because of their position in relation to eastern European locations most trafficked puppies entering under PETS enter the country via Dover and Eurotunnel. The responsibility for vehicle inspections is the responsibility of the ferry operators on behalf of DEFRA under PETS and largely relies on the honesty of travellers.

Checking regimes of Dunkirk and Calais are based upon declaration at the check-in booth. The microchip reading is carried out by the person responsible for the animals and the scanner is then passed to the individual within the booth. The work station of the individual within the booth, and the position of the rear of the vehicle in relation to this, prevents visual inspection. At no time during our investigation were ferry operator staff observed leaving their booths to check vehicles.¹⁷

In the event of a traveller not declaring animals in their vehicle and going through the automated check-in it is very possible that they would not be discovered and

If they were to be, there are no penalties and in the event of non-compliant animals being present, the traveller would be prevented from embarkation and escorted from the site. Should a problem occur which results in an animal being refused travel, the transporter can attempt to travel with another ferry operator.¹⁸

It appears that the majority of animals travel over the weekends when there are minimal chances of being stopped. Dogs Trust surveillance at Dover:

... the greater flow of East European 'post bus' traffic is from 18:00 on Friday until approximately 12:00 Sunday and these vehicles are mainly responsible for the importation of puppies into the UK. Our surveillance at Dover confirmed the information gained from dealers during our investigations in Lithuania and Hungary – namely puppies were scheduled to leave Eastern Europe on Thursday to arrive in the UK on Friday evening and Saturday morning when there is the least chance of being stopped.¹⁹

16. P4 <https://rompetid.ro/files/downloads/utile/PuppyTradeReport-2015.pdf>

17. P23 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

18. P23 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

19. P23 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

The Dogs Trust identified the following abuses

1. It is possible to bring five puppies per person into the UK – as pets.
2. Two to three people in a van can bring in 10-15 puppies legally (five each) under PETS even if they are to be sold they should be declared under the Balai directive).
3. Once in the UK, these puppies can then be sold by disposing of the paperwork and pretending the dog is from the UK.
4. Bringing in underage puppies and claiming they are older to fulfil PETS criteria of 15 weeks of age. These puppies are hidden in the back of a vehicle and not declared.
5. Falsifying paperwork, such as pet passports.

Further to the completion of the scoping project, two countries, Lithuania and Hungary, were identified as major targets to investigate due to both countries having a risk of rabies, as well as currently importing a significant number of puppies to the UK under PETS.²⁰

DISEASES

While PETS made life easier for pet owners travelling with their own animals to and from the United Kingdom it has also resulted in diseased puppies bred in sub-standard conditions being illegally imported, mainly from eastern Europe, with falsified passports under the scheme. This could mean that animals infected with rabies and other diseases could enter the country. According to the Dogs Trust investigation:

Six vets in Lithuania and Hungary admitted falsifying the information on pet passports and fifteen breeders or dealers we met in both countries confirmed they regularly transport underage puppies into the UK.²¹

Controls on vehicles containing dogs coming in via ports are negligible, particularly at weekends. False vaccination certificates regarding rabies vaccinations have been used. Puppies far too young to be separated from their mothers are being brought into the country. According to the Gov.UK website puppies need to be at least 12 weeks old before receiving a rabies vaccination and then wait a further 21 days after the last of the primary course of vaccinations.²² This means that legally puppies need to be at least 15 weeks old before travelling to this country.

The Dogs Trust investigation states:

Our investigation reveals how the PETS scheme is being used as a cover by commercial dealers from Hungary and Lithuania on a regular basis to illegally import puppies into the UK. These dealers were aided and abetted by unscrupulous vets in Eastern Europe, who, in collusion with the dealers, are prepared to issue pet passports with falsified data. Passports are issued by vets for puppies they have not seen; the age of puppies are changed to evade contravening PETS; dogs banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act are being brought into the country; and false vaccination stamps are added indicating rabies vaccinations had been given to puppies when they had not actually been administered. Unlike rabies, there are no initiatives to control Echinococcus multilocularis in countries where it is endemic. Dogs Trust wonders whether an individual that is prepared to falsify rabies vaccinations would bother with tapeworm treatment or measures to prevent other diseases?²³

20. P25 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

21. P2 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

22. <https://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/rabies-vaccination-boosters-and-blood-tests>

23. P4 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

A later Dogs Trust report from July 2017 confirms that the problem is on-going:

Undercover footage revealed a vet in Lithuania selling sedatives to allow puppies to be smuggled across the British border. Puppies as young as four weeks old were also transported with their umbilical cords still attached during a cramped 1,000 mile, 30-hour journey across Europe.

In another shocking case, puppies were observed vomiting and another eating their own faeces during a journey in a packed mini-van from Lithuania. Confined to pet carriers stacked amongst other packages in the back of the van with no air conditioning, and outside temperatures of 25 degrees, the puppies were given water just twice and not fed at all.

Vets in Poland and Lithuania were also filmed falsifying pet passports and faking rabies vaccination records, enabling underage puppies to slip through the net without the correct paperwork as part of the third undercover investigation by Dogs Trust.²⁴

According to the British Veterinary Association in December 2016:

“One in three vets who treat pets have seen puppies they believe to have been illegally imported from overseas in the last year, according to figures released by the UK’s leading body for vets, BVA.”

BVA’s Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey, which surveyed over 1,000 vets from across the UK, revealed that vets’ suspicions had been raised for several reasons including foreign microchips and the puppy’s age not matching the age given in its passports, with some vets also citing the puppy’s health as a problem after seeing cases of parvovirus and kennel cough.

The most common breeds suspected by vets to have been illegally imported are those that are in hot demand, made popular by celebrity owners or promoted through merchandise. Half of vets surveyed voiced concerns about illegal imports of French bulldog puppies, with Pugs (29%) and Chihuahuas (16%) coming in as the second and third most common.

Vet Gudrun Ravetz, President of the British Veterinary Association, said:

“Illegal importers only care about profit, not puppy welfare. As vets, we’ve heard awful stories of people buying puppies only for their puppy to be dead 24 hours later because of the way it was bred and cared for in its early days outside of the UK.”²⁵

The Kennel Club runs an Assured Breeder Scheme which promotes good breeding practice and aims to work together with breeders and buyers to force irresponsible breeders, or puppy farmers, out of business.²⁶

Recent research by the Kennel Club found that

Almost a quarter (23 percent) of people will spend 5 minutes or less researching where to buy a puppy, but a similar percentage (22 per cent) will invest half an hour or more when choosing a new pair of shoes. Choosing a puppy will take 36 percent of people 20 minutes or less, compared to just 16 percent who are prepared to be so reckless with the time spent on their weekly supermarket shop.²⁷

24. <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/news-events/news/undercover-investigation-by-dogs-trust-reveals-sickening-puppy-smuggling-trade-is-rife>

25. <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-campaigns-and-policy/newsroom/news-releases/vets-warn-of-puppy-misery-as-a-third-suspect-illegal-imports/>

26. <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/assured-breeder-scheme/>

27. <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/press-releases/2017/september/people-more-likely-to-buy-a-puppy-on-impulse-than-a-new-pair-of-shoes/>

CASE STUDY FROM THE BLUE CROSS

Doris – French Bulldog with Coccidiosis and neurological problems

Doris was first brought into Blue Cross with an upset tummy. Her owner's had bought her from someone who provided them with a vaccine certificate and a passport stating that Doris had come from Lithuania. She had no other paperwork with her and the sellers were not contactable after Doris was taken home. She had been having ongoing diarrhoea with fresh blood in it.

Doris was examined by one of our vets and it was discovered that Doris had Coccidia, an intestinal parasite, passed by dogs swallowing faecal particles of contaminated faeces. It is most commonly seen in younger dogs.

At her next check-up, Doris was much better than she was but she still has some accidents at home. She was

booked for x-rays of her legs as she seems to hover rather than sit down, and our vets were concerned that there may be a neurological problem causing this.

On her next visit, her owners confirmed that she was still faecally and urinary incontinent. Doris was still sitting in an odd way, and she was generally depressed at home. The vet discussed a condition that is overrepresented in bulldogs, meaning that there are vertebral malformations, which have an impact of the nerves supplying the body. Faecal and urinary incontinence can be associated with this. The vet explained to the owners that this was likely what had caused her problems, and this would likely not improve. Her owners decided that as her quality of life was not good, and elected to euthanase her at six months old.

It was a very upsetting time for her owners, and of course the staff, but yet another example of a possible genetic defect in these dogs, causing suffering.

It also found that:

- Choosing a puppy hastily leaves people more vulnerable to the scams of puppy farmers, with almost a quarter (22 percent) thinking they bought from a puppy farm, if they chose their pup in 20 minutes or less.
- For pups purchased in twenty minutes or less by their owners, almost one in six (15 per cent) of these experience illness, ongoing veterinary treatment or death in the first six months – three times higher than those chosen in an hour or more
- More than one fifth (21 per cent) suffer financially and the same proportion (21 per cent) suffer emotionally if they spent 20 minutes or less researching where to buy a puppy, compared to less than one tenth (7 per cent) financially and 8 per cent emotionally for those who spent longer than an hour.²⁸

Caroline Kisko, Secretary of the Kennel Club, stated

This research is a wake-up call for anybody who cares about dog welfare as a rather terrifying picture is emerging of a nation of people who are careless when it comes to choosing where and how to buy a dog, and who feel clueless about where they would begin, if they were to

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attempt to do this responsibly.

“The result is puppies with all manner of health and behavioural problems being sold via the internet, pet shops or social media to people who don't know the true background of the pups and who pay the price in veterinary bills and heartache, as they watch their beloved pet suffer.

In its manifesto the Kennel Club states

Investigations have found that PETS is regularly used as a cover to import puppies for commercial purposes and revealed the fraudulent issuing of pet passports with falsified data, the importation of under age puppies and issues with controls at the border. This presents a problem not only for the acquisition of dogs, as highlighted earlier in our manifesto, but also has public health implications. For example; if dogs are not appropriately treated against the tapeworm, there is a risk of this zoonotic parasite being introduced into the UK which can

be passed from animal to human. There are also other diseases which are not covered in the current legislation, which have great potential to compromise animal health in the UK. These include leishmaniasis, ehrlichiosis and babesiosis.²⁹

The Kennel Club and the Canine & Feline Sector Group have recommended that, with the advent of Brexit, the reinstatement of certain controls to combat abuses of PETS:

Regulation No 576/2013 sets out the requirements for dogs, cats and ferrets which are moved for non-commercial purposes between EU Member States or into the EU and requires all dogs, cats and ferrets which are moved between or into Member States to be microchipped,

vaccinated against rabies and to have a valid pet passport. The key improvements recommended by CFSG to the legislation on non-commercial pet travel are:

Rabies antibody titration test – We suggest consideration of the reintroduction of rabies blood testing before entry into the UK. While the need to blood sample 21–30 days after vaccination and wait for results may slightly increase the age at which puppies travel, the primary reason for supporting the re-introduction is to ensure that vaccination has been successfully carried out in accordance with the regulations. We would also recommend a wait period of at least 30 days

after the date of vaccination and for there then to be a 3 month wait period before the pet animal is moved between countries. Although there have not been any confirmed cases of rabies in animals travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme, a single dog or cat developing rabies in the UK could have a profoundly damaging impact on the public attitude towards pet ownership. Furthermore, although not the primary reason for adding a wait period, this would also make it easier for authorities to differentiate between adult dogs and those that are too young to legally enter the country.

*Tick treatment – We recommend that a requirement is reintroduced for dogs and cats to be treated against ticks before entering the UK, to prevent exotic parasitic infections such as *Babesia canis* and *Ehrlichia canis* being introduced into the UK. This could be based on the previous requirement for tick treatment.³⁰*

29. http://p35 www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1139181/a_dog_s_life_manifesto___snap_election_update.pdf

30. P36 http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1139181/a_dog_s_life_manifesto___snap_election_update.pdf

THE FINANCES

According to the figures supplied to us by the Blue Cross via Gumtree regarding 104 users who were suspected of repeatedly selling dogs and puppies in England, Scotland and Wales prices for puppies ranged from a lowest average price of £220 to a highest average price of £1,385. One user using 158 post codes and 133 email addresses with an average of 34 advertisements per month could net a potential profit of between £333,600 and £1,334,400 over a two year period. Bearing in mind that, compared with tobacco or alcohol smuggling, the risk of detection is considerably less, the trade is very attractive providing that puppies are trafficked young enough to avoid costly maintenance and before any diseases manifest themselves.

Added to this there is the fact that if a driver believes he is likely to be caught with the trafficked puppies on board, all he has to do is to open the back of the vehicle and throw them out. It is considerably more difficult to dispose of a load of illicit tobacco or wine.

The trade of puppies via PETS may appear to the outsider to be small scale and not particularly significant, however, once one delves into the economics of the trade a bigger picture emerges, which explains the financial appeal of importing puppies into the UK.

Popular breeds of puppies such as French Bulldogs and Pugs are regularly advertised on internet sites from around £750 each. If a dealer imports five puppies at a time with one passenger, the potential income for one consignment of puppies would be £3,750. With two passengers that means ten puppies could be transported so the income rises to £7,500. The cost to the dealer of purchasing a dog, arranging for a passport and transportation to the UK would be around £200. Therefore, the dealer is left with a healthy profit of £550 per puppy, or around £2,750 per single consignment of five puppies. Some dealers we met over the course of our investigation boasted that they travel each week, hence their potential profits could reach well over £100,000 per year.

The main advantage to the dealer is that there is very little risk involved – unlike smuggling cigarettes into the UK. We estimate that the profit generated from one consignment of puppies is equivalent to that of smuggling thousands of cigarettes.³¹

The trade in trafficked puppies happens because it is very profitable and relatively risk-free. We believe that the trade would decrease or die if the available profit to dealers and breeders was substantially reduced. If limitations to the number of animals it is possible to bring into the country per vehicle were introduced, an age limit of over six months and further costly tests and vaccinations required, the profit margins would be eroded and the trade would cease to be attractive.

31. P22 [https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web\(1\).pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press-materials/dt_puppy_smuggling_report_v12_web(1).pdf)

CONCLUSION

This statement by Paula Boyden, veterinary director for Dogs Trust encapsulates the current situation:

“These shocking cases clearly show that urgent action is needed to stop the puppy smuggling scandal. It remains as serious an issue for animal welfare and public health in 2017 as it did in 2014, when our first investigation highlighted the devastating effects of the 2012 changes to the Pet Travel Scheme, which effectively invited corrupt dealers to traffic underage puppies into Great Britain without the required treatments.

“The number of prosecutions is far too low and the lack of visual checks at ferry ports and borders is unacceptable. We want to see stronger deterrents including prison sentences for those caught trafficking puppies. To highlight the flaws in the system, we smuggled a fake dog ‘Charly’ though the border twice – once at Eurotunnel and once at Dover – after no visual checks were made.

“The government must revise pet travel legislation when the UK leaves the EU and ensure that puppies entering this country are healthy, not underage and are not being brought in to sell on to unsuspecting buyers via a scheme meant for non-commercial use.”

Puppies are bred in large numbers, often in horrific conditions in Central and Eastern Europe by corrupt breeders who are continuing to exploit the demand for these desirable breeds in Great Britain. They are brought into the country illegally at a young age in order to appear ‘cuter’ to buyers, with desirable breeds such as Pugs, Dachshunds, English and French Bulldogs making up 82% of those intercepted at the border.

In 2016 alone, 275,876 dogs travelled to Great Britain on the Pet Travel Scheme; a non-commercial system allowing animals to travel easily between EU Member States without undergoing quarantine. The highest number of puppies intercepted as part of the Dogs Trust Puppy Pilot arrived from Hungary, Poland and Lithuania with Latvia, Slovakia and Romania also predominant. Of the puppies seized, more than 95% of puppies rescued by Dogs Trust were deemed too young to travel and 6% sadly died due to poor health, malnutrition and dehydration.³²

32. <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/news-events/news/undercover-investigation-by-dogs-trust-reveals-sickening-puppy-smuggling-trade-is-rife>

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that the PETS Scheme be amended to permit only 5 animals per vehicle rather than 5 per person up to the current limit of 3 persons with possible waivers for bona fide breeders travelling to established dog shows. This would limit the financial incentives to trafficking.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that that no dog or cat under the age of 6 months be permitted to enter the country under PETS. This would be a disincentive to breeders as it would mean they would have to feed and support an animal for a much longer period cutting any profit. Also at 6 months an animal is past the “cuddly” stage and therefore not as easy to sell.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that rabies testing and tick treatments be reintroduced with a wait period of at least 30 days after the date of vaccination and for there then to be a 3 month wait period before the pet animal is moved between countries. In addition to the disease limitation factor this would also be a financial disincentive.

We are most grateful to the following for their help and advice in preparing this report.

The RSPCA

The Blue Cross

Dogs Trust

The British Veterinary Association

Sharon Edwards, City of London Animal Health Inspector

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