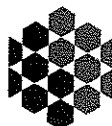


From the Office of the Minister
Michelle O'Neill MLA



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

www.dardni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MANNYSTRIE O

**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

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Our Ref: COR/136/2013

Your Ref: P-04-398

23 April 2013

William, a chara

Thank you for your letter of 27 February 2013 regarding the petition calling for the creation of an Animal Offenders Register which would include the names and addresses of people convicted of animal welfare offences both here and in Britain. I understand that the intention of the database is that breeders and sellers of animals would have to check the database before transferring ownership of an animal to another person and should they supply an animal to a person convicted of animal cruelty they would be guilty of an offence.

Animal welfare in the north of Ireland is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. The Act is enforced by a number of agencies: my Department (DARD) in respect of farmed animals; District Councils in respect of non-farmed animals; and the PSNI regarding animal fighting and baiting. I believe it is important that each agency has ready access to up-to-date information in order to check if a person has been disqualified from keeping animals or has any previous animal welfare related convictions. To this end, officials from my Department will be engaging with the Department of Justice, the PSNI and Councils to discuss issues around the access to information relating to animal welfare court cases and the sharing of such information between enforcement bodies. Officials will be exploring the possibility of a joint database, open to all three animal welfare enforcement agencies with the Department of Justice, who is currently responsible for maintaining details relating to animal welfare convictions and penalties. Such a database would be for enforcement purposes only and would not be accessible by the public, animal breeders, sellers or charities.

Following a high profile welfare case here last summer, the idea of a publicly facing register of animal welfare offenders that pet shops and animal breeders could access before transferring ownership of an animal to another person was considered. However, legal advice on this matter

If you have a hearing difficulty you can contact
the Department via the textphone on 028 9052 4420



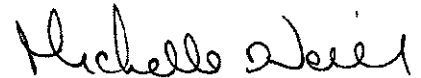
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

suggests that there are very significant human rights and data protection issues that would have to be taken into consideration in the first instance. There are also significant resource implications to be considered in maintaining the database. For these reasons I have not pursued the idea of a publicly facing animal offenders register for the north of Ireland at this time. In view of the factors that I have outlined above I would not be in favour of having a joint north of Ireland /British database.

I would however, be keen to be kept informed of any developments that are made on this issue.

I have also emailed a copy of my reply to your Clerk, Naomi Stocks.

Is mise le meas



MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development