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9th May 2013
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Mr W Powell AM
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Mr. Powell,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to the Petitions Committee regarding an "Animal offenders register".

Whilst in principle the WLGA would agree that the establishment of a register would be a useful tool to identify those who have committed animal offences, there would be a number of concerns regarding the proportionality, cost, parameters, and logistics of setting up and maintaining such a register.

The obvious benefit of a database would be that it would enable breeders, sellers, and enforcement agencies to check for convictions and hopefully reduce the number of future incidents of animal cruelty.

The WLGA understands there are around 80 convictions per year of this nature in Wales. Whilst this is a not a small number, we would imagine the cost of setting up and maintaining a register may be disproportionate to the benefit gained.

From a practical perspective we would have a number of concerns:

- How would the database be funded? It would be very unlikely that the cost would be covered by a levy against those who are convicted (bearing in mind the low numbers). In the current financial climate – would Welsh Government be able to find suitable funding?
- Would only responsible sellers / breeders make use of the register? How and who would be able to police this? What sanctions could be applied? Would the cost of applying those sanctions through a criminal (or possibly civil sanctions) procedure be justified?
- Who would be able to access the database? Animal cruelty is an emotive issue. The data would need to be widely available and readily accessible. This data in the wrong hands could be dangerously abused.
- A paper database would be inaccessible and unwieldy; a secure accessible electronic database would be costly in terms

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- of dealing with the scale of the problem
- Any database would need to be regularly maintained and updated, there is a significant resource attached to this to ensure the ongoing usefulness of the database
 - Which convictions and what animals would be within scope for the database?
 - The Wales /England border issue needs to be considered – sellers / buyers / enforcers etc and those effects on the effectiveness of the database

The WLGA does consider there is merit in establishing a national database that would encompass all offences against animals (including farmed animals) relating to all animal health and welfare legislation. This information would be available to agencies such as DEFRA, WG, AHVLA, RIW and Local Authorities. We would however have similar concerns regarding proportionality, costs etc as outlined above.

Although only an idea, and as an alternative and less costly approach, would it be feasible to make it a duty on sellers / breeders to undertake some form of due diligence process. This could be an intelligence gathering tool, it would be easier to maintain control of the information, and would also act as a deterrent to those who are not eligible to purchase or have ownership of animals?

For example should sellers / breeders etc be required to only sell to those who can produce photographic ID, and to then record details of names and addresses of purchasers, what animals have been purchased, and require the buyer to sign a declaration of some sort?

This information could be made available to regulatory bodies periodically – for example at times of licence renewal, inspections etc. This evidence could then be used as the basis of formal action against the individual if necessary.

Again as an alternative policy – it is probably without doubt that the majority of animal owners are responsible and wish to care for their animals in a responsible way. Should more attention be paid to those who have been convicted to ensure that if disqualification orders or other conditions have been applied, that they are adhered to? This of course carries its own set of problems in terms of how that would be policed and by whom, but it is likely to cost less, and target enforcement activity in a more intelligence led way.

Hopefully this information is of some use to you while discussing this petition further.

Regards, Simon.



Simon Wilkinson
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