



DEBATE PACK

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Animal Welfare Plans

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A debate will be held in Westminster Hall at 4.30pm on Monday 7 June 2021 on three petitions on subjects concerning animal welfare: shark finning, puppy imports and ear cropping. The subject for the debate has been nominated by the Petitions Committee, and the debate will be opened by Elliot Colburn MP.

The three e-petitions to be debated are number [300535](#) on the trade in shark fins, number [326261](#) on the import of puppies, and number [574305](#) on the cropping of dogs' ears.

These three subjects relate to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), published on 12 May 2021.

This debate pack provides background information and useful links.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Shark finning

There are 46 species of sharks and rays listed on CITES, which means trade in them or their products is either prohibited or restricted and requiring permits. There are no UK import or export restrictions for species that are not CITES listed.¹

A January 2021 article in Nature highlighted a 71% [decline in species abundance](#) of sharks and rays since 1970:

We find that, since 1970, the global abundance of oceanic sharks and rays has declined by 71% owing to an 18-fold increase in relative fishing pressure. This depletion has increased the global extinction risk to the point at which three-quarters of the species comprising this functionally important assemblage are threatened with extinction. Strict prohibitions and precautionary science-based catch limits are urgently needed to avert population collapse, avoid the disruption of ecological functions and promote species recovery.²

There have been long-standing campaigns to protect shark species, from fishing activity, including so-called finning. This is the practice of catching sharks, removing their fins and throwing them back into the water, sometimes alive. [The Shark Trust](#) sets out on its website the threats to shark populations globally which include overfishing, the demand for shark products, shark finning and the threats to their habitats from pollution and climate change.

1.1 Shark fin petition

A petition from [Shark Guardian](#) calling for [a UK ban on the import of shark fins](#) closed on 11 September 2020, having received 115,382 responses. It is due to be debated in Parliament on 7 June 2021.

The [petition](#) called for the UK to be the first European country to introduce a ban on the import of shark fins. The Government provided a response to the petition on 3 November 2020, which included the following:

The UK Government is strongly opposed to shark finning, the practice of removing the fins of a shark and discarding the body at sea. The UK has already banned the act of shark finning and has enforced a Fins Naturally Attached policy in order to combat illegal finning of sharks in UK and EU waters. This means that shark fins from sharks fished in UK and EU waters can only be retained and utilised provided they are still attached to the shark when landed at port by fishing vessels.

Following the end of the Transition period we will explore options consistent with World Trade Organisation rules to address the importation of shark fins from other areas, to support efforts to end illegal shark finning practices globally.

¹ Defra, [Call for evidence on the scale of Shark Fin Trade in the UK and possible impacts of stricter controls](#), December 2020

² Nature, [Half a century of global decline in oceanic sharks and rays](#), 27 January 2021

The UK Government does not oppose the capture and use of sharks providing catches are shown to be genuinely sustainable; the whole shark is used; and that fins are not removed from sharks while alive. The Government is also exploring a range of other measures to support shark conservation.

The [response](#) also set out the Government views on the existing 20kg personal allowance of dried shark fins:

In addition, EU law [applicable at the time of the response] allows individuals travelling to Europe to carry 20kg of dried shark fins for personal consumption. Our departure from the EU allows us to consider options to tighten the personal import allowance and improve the traceability of the shark in fin trade in the UK.

1.2 Shark finning statistics

It is not known exactly how many sharks are killed or wounded each year by the practice of finning.

The most recent, reliable estimate of the number of sharks killed worldwide by finning was around **97 million in 2010**, within a broad range of between 63 million and 273 million.³ An earlier estimate put the figure at 73 million in 2006.⁴

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) 2015 report [State of the global market for shark products](#):

The vast majority of shark fins are destined for consumption in a relatively small selection of countries and territories in East and Southeast Asia such as China, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan Province of China, Singapore, Malaysia and Viet Nam. However, the world's largest consumers of shark meat are found in South America and Europe, with the most important importers being Italy, Brazil, Uruguay, Spain and the Republic of Korea – the latter being the major importer of skate and ray meat.⁵

Globally, around USD 438.6 million worth of shark fins were exported in 2011, or a total of around 17,154 tonnes, according to the FAO report.

Hong Kong SAR is the largest importer and exporter of shark fins, accounting for the majority of the trade. However, the [volume of shark fin imports to Hong Kong SAR](#) had declined by around 50% in the decade to 2018. The size of the Hong Kong trade also declined by around 60% between 2019 and 2020, likely in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶

Data on the value of shark fin imports to the UK is not available, suggesting the value of any commercial shark fin imports to the UK is very small – trade in commodities below a value of £873 is not recorded separately by HMRC. A [response to a Parliamentary Question](#) from 2019 provided details of the value of UK exports since 2015:

³ Worm et al. (2013) '[Global catches, exploitation rates, and rebuilding options for sharks](#)', *Marine Policy*, Vol.40, pp.194-204

⁴ Clarke, et al. (2006) '[Global estimates of shark catches using trade records from commercial markets](#)', *Ecology Letters*, Vol. 9, pp.1115-1126

⁵ FAO [State of the global market for shark products](#), p.3, 2015

⁶ WWF, '[HK shark fin imports down 70% since 2009, WWF announces](#)', 14 July 2020.

In 2014, 2015 and 2016 there were no exports of shark fin products. In 2017 there were 50 tonnes exported and in 2018 there were 35 tonnes exported.⁷

1.3 Campaigns to protect sharks

The Shark Trust is currently running a campaign internationally to [introduce fishing limits on several species](#) where catches are not restricted, and [summarises issues](#) with overfishing, which include a high demand for all shark products,:

The biggest threat to sharks globally is overfishing. Each year many tens of millions of sharks are landed. Fuelled by a high demand for shark products. Sharks play vital roles in marine ecosystems. So, as shark populations rapidly decline around the world, so too does the health of our oceans.

A global expansion of shark fishing has been underway for several decades. Inadequate fisheries management worldwide is a big challenge to shark conservation. As is the complex nature of the international trade of shark products. Our job becomes more challenging still due to a lack of shark data and resources. Also a lack of international agreement to properly monitor, manage and control shark fisheries and trade.

Shark finning has been [banned in UK and EU waters](#). However, issues still remain as set out by the Shark Trust, which summarises why it is a particular concern:

Shark finning is the process of cutting off the fins of a shark and discarding the body, often still alive, at sea. This wasteful and cruel practice contradicts all principles of sustainability. It also makes effective fisheries management impossible. It's illegal in many parts of the world, including Europe. But, weak legislation and ineffective enforcement often undermines shark finning regulations.

The petition itself is part of a campaign run by [Shark Guardians](#) launched in 2020. It focused specifically on the existing 20kg personal import allowance of dried shark fins. It raised the following concerns:

- Currently it is legal to bring 20kg of dried shark fin into the UK according to the 'fish and fish product' allowances set by UK Border Force without declaration.
- 20kg of dried shark fin potentially equates to hundreds of sharks butchered dependent on size.
- Many of these fins could belong to threatened shark species listed under CITES (Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species). These could make their way into the UK illegally through the loophole identified in the import system.
- It is required that imported items over the value of £390 be declared to UK Border Force. 20kg of shark fins can have a value of over £4,000. This identifies huge tax evasion potential.

There is some disagreement on best approach for improving protection for sharks. The Shark Trust's [response to campaigns on banning fins](#) is

⁷ HC Deb 08 October 2019 | [Sharks: Animal Products](#) PQ 291134; PQ 291137

that that it is engaging with the Government on the issue but that a ban will not in itself address the issue of overfishing:

But banning fins is not the same as banning finning. And banning the sale of fins, particularly in the UK, would unfortunately do very little to end the overfishing of sharks.

[...]

Despite the promising progress towards ending finning, the Fin Trade is, of course, still a concern. But there's also a growing market for shark meat, concentrated in different global markets. Shark fisheries and their drivers are complex. Requiring a multitude of approaches to ensure appropriate management for these diverse and vulnerable species.

We have to consider the whole picture rather than focussing on a single part of it.

Put bluntly, banning the import of fins is not asking enough of our policymakers. It also potentially endangers future conservation efforts by focussing attention on an overly simplified solution to a complex problem.

1.4 Government call for evidence and proposed ban

The Government [launched a call for evidence](#) in December 2020 on protecting endangered shark species, specifically the impact of the fin trade, with the following remit:

The government is now seeking additional evidence to ensure that appropriate protection is in place for all shark species and to inform future policy on protecting marine wildlife.

The call for evidence will help the government better understand the scale of the shark fin trade in the UK and the conservation, economic, social and cultural impacts of potential further restrictions such as banning the import and export of detached shark fins.

The greatest threat to sharks is overfishing, driven by demand for shark products. Wild populations of shark, skates and ray species have declined rapidly and species such as the scalloped hammerhead and angel shark are now considered critically endangered.

The call for evidence will provide insight into the role of the shark fin trade and what action can be taken to better protect sharks.⁸

The Government called for evidence in four areas:

- scale of shark fin trade in the UK
- conservation impacts of shark fin trade in the UK
- economic, social and cultural impacts of further restrictions on shark fin trade in the UK
- international issues⁹

⁸ Defra, [Shark fins: Call for evidence on protecting endangered shark species launches](#), 6 December 2020

⁹ Defra, [Call for evidence on the scale of Shark Fin Trade in the UK and possible impacts of stricter controls](#), December 2020

Following the Queen's Speech on 11 May 2021, the Government published an [Animal Welfare Action Plan](#) covering a broad range of animal welfare issues that would be legislated for. This included a commitment on legislating to ban the import and export of shark fins:

The UK has a strong track record in marine conservation, and we have been pressing for stronger international action to protect sharks against unsustainable fishing practices and shark finning. Shark finning is the practice of removing a shark's fins at sea and discarding the finless body back in the water. It is a barbaric practice that has rightly been banned in the UK for nearly 20 years, but we do still import shark fins which may contribute to the practice. To this end, we will bring in legislation to ban the import and export of detached shark fins.

Shark Guardian [welcomed the announcement](#) as a response to their campaign.

A [further parliamentary petition](#) is currently live, having received just over 1500 signatures calling for a ban on the sale and possession of dried shark fins, and states:

The UK government should close all loopholes regarding this industry, and should consider making shark fin a banned commodity.

1.5 Further reading and useful links

Petition 300535, [The UK should ban the importation of Shark Fins](#)

Information from Gov.UK

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), 12 May 2021

See p9:

The UK has a strong track record in marine conservation, and we have been pressing for stronger international action to protect sharks against unsustainable fishing practices and shark finning. Shark finning is the practice of removing a shark's fins at sea and discarding the finless body back in the water. It is a barbaric practice that has rightly been banned in the UK for nearly 20 years, but we do still import shark fins which may contribute to the practice. To this end, we will bring in legislation to ban the import and export of detached shark fins.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs press release, [Shark fins: Call for evidence on protecting endangered shark species launches](#), 6 December 2020

See [consultation](#) which ran 6 December 2020 - 4 January 2021

Parliamentary information

Parliamentary Question [Sharks: Animal Products](#)

Asked by: Sharma, Mr Virendra

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of banning the import of shark fins into the UK.

Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The UK has a strong track record in marine conservation and places great importance on ensuring that appropriate protection and management is in place for all shark species.

The UK Government is strongly opposed to shark finning, the practice of removing the fins of a shark and discarding the body at sea. The UK has already banned the act of shark finning and has enforced a Fins Naturally Attached policy in order to combat illegal finning of sharks in UK and EU waters. This means that shark fins from sharks fished in UK and EU waters can only be retained and utilised provided they are still attached to the shark when landed at port by fishing vessels.

Following the end of the Transition Period we will explore options consistent with World Trade Organization rules to address the importation of shark fins from other areas, to support efforts to end illegal shark finning practices globally.

HC Deb 09 Oct 2020 | PQ 98681

Parliamentary Questions [Sharks: Animal Products](#)

Asked by: Pollard, Luke

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps she is taking to prevent the export of shark fins from the UK.

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many tons of shark fins were exported from the UK in each of the last five years.

Answering Member: George Eustice | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

In 2014, 2015 and 2016 there were no exports of shark fin products. In 2017 there were 50 tonnes exported and in 2018 there were 35 tonnes exported.

The UK has banned shark finning through the EU Council resolution 605/2013 that states that all sharks must be landed with their fins naturally attached to the carcass to reduce the risk of finning occurring. We continue to champion this provision being adopted globally.

There are no legal constraints on exporting shark fins from the UK per se. However, we have domestic legislation (e.g. the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Tope Order) which places emphasis on conservation of threatened or endangered species, establishing a legal framework for the protection of such species as well as jurisdiction over fisheries.

In addition to domestic legislation, there is regional protection through rules in the Common Fisheries Policy – either through prohibitions, catch limits and/or gear restrictions (e.g. deep sea net restrictions), and through Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

We also have international protection through a number of agreements such as the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) and the Sharks MoU.

The UK continues to press for stronger regional and international controls. The UK played a leading role in successfully championing the listing of an additional 18 shark species to appendix II of CITES at the Conference on Parties in August this year. A CITES listing provides significant conservation benefit by ensuring trade is monitored and can only take place in a sustainable manner.

HC Deb 08 October 2019 | PQ 291134; PQ 291137

News and campaigns

Scuba Diver Magazine, 12 May 2021 [UK shark-fin trade 'dead in the water'](#)

Independent, 28 January 2021 [Shark and ray populations nearing 'point of no return' after 70 per cent drop](#)

Nature, 27 January 2021 [Half a century of global decline in oceanic sharks and rays](#)

Greenpeace Unearthed, 29 July 2019 [Britain has exported more than 50 tonnes of shark fins since 2017](#)

Bite-Back Shark and Marine Conservation: [News](#)

Marine Stewardship Council [Ending shark finning](#)

2. Puppy Imports

In 2020, a petition to [ban the exploitative import of young puppies](#) for sale in the UK received 128,549 signatures. The petition called for changes to the law and ban on transporting young puppies long distances. In its response, the Government ruled out unilaterally banning the import of puppies but outlined its policy for tackling the issue:

Our policy is to ensure, therefore, full application of existing EU rules on our territory during the Transition Period, and to encourage other member states to do the same. Unilaterally banning the import of puppies would amount to a restriction on trade which would need strong justification under World Trade Organisation rules and whilst we remain in the transition period, is not possible under EU trade law. Following the end of the Transition period we will explore options to combat the trade in young puppies which are consistent with World Trade Organisation rules.

The government also continues to raise awareness regarding the improper selling of pets by deceitful sellers through our 'Petfished' campaign which seeks to educate prospective pet buyers on common tricks and tactics used by deceitful sellers which may result in the purchase of a mistreated or unwell pet. The campaign urges buyers to mitigate risks, for example by buying from trusted sellers such as those under the Kennel Club's Assured Breeder scheme, viewing puppies with their mothers and siblings, asking questions of the seller and following the Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA Puppy Contract to ensure that puppies are in good health when purchased.¹⁰

2.1 Legislation Controlling Puppy Imports

There are different rules for the commercial and non-commercial movement of animals imported into the UK. These are set out below. However, according to a number of animal organisations, both routes are used for illegally importing puppies into the UK.

Commercial Movements

In March 2021, the APHA (the Animal and Plant Health Agency) published an import information note on the [Commercial Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets](#).

EU legislation as it stood on 31 December 2020 that the UK already complies with has been incorporated into our domestic law as "retained EU law" under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. References in our guidance and certification to such EU instruments should be taken to be references to this "retained EU law". Our current standards will remain in force, without amendment, in the immediate months after our EU exit as part of UK domestic law (apart from corrections to make the EU legislation fully operable).¹¹

Setting out the legislation further, the information note states that:

¹⁰ Defra, [Response to petition: Ban the exploitative import of young puppies for sale in the UK](#), 8 September 2020

¹¹ APHA, [Commercial Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets: Import Information Note \(IIN\) BLLV/5b](#), March 2021 p2

The movement of cats, dogs and ferrets is governed by two regimes, the “Balai regime” (including the Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011, which implemented the ‘Balai’ directive (92/65/EC)) for what are termed ‘commercial movements’ and the Pet Travel Regulation (Retained EU Regulation 576/2013) for cats, dogs and ferrets that comply with pet requirements. It is important that cats, dogs and ferrets travel under the correct regime for the type of movement.¹²

The APHA information note also states that animal movements meeting the following criteria are classed as commercial movements:

- The movements of groups of more than five cats, dogs or ferrets per person travelling;
- The movement of cats, dogs and ferrets involving a change of ownership and/or for rehoming, including rescue animals (see below);
- Pet animals that are not able to fulfil the requirement of the Pet Travel regulation for travelling within five days of their owner or owner’s representative.¹³

The Government outlined the relevant animal welfare legislation for commercial animal movement in response to the petition, on 8 September 2020, stating that:

The rules concerning the commercial transportation of animals are set out in Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and in domestic legislation, The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 (WATEO). The EU legislation aims to protect the welfare of animals during transportation and applies to animals transported in connection with an economic activity.

Under article 4 of The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006, there are some general provisions for the protection of all animals during transport. It is an offence to transport animals, including people transporting dogs, in a way that will cause injury or unnecessary suffering. Animals must be transported in a means of transport which takes in to consideration the conditions required for the animals such as space, ventilation, temperature, security, liquid and oxygen needs.

The primary responsibility for the enforcement of the transport legislation rests with Local Authorities. Local Authorities carry out routine welfare checks on animals and their means of transport and will take appropriate enforcement measures up to and including prosecution if required.¹⁴

Non-Commercial movement of pets

Before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, the UK was part of the European Union’s (EU) Pet Travel Scheme (PETS). This required imported puppies to be a minimum of 15 weeks old.

On 16 December 2020, the Government announced that the UK would have Part 2 listed status from 1 January 2020 and outlined the [new](#)

¹² APHA, [Commercial Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets: Import Information Note \(IIN\) BLLV/5b](#), March 2021 p2

¹³ APHA, [Commercial Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets: Import Information Note \(IIN\) BLLV/5b](#), March 2021 p3

¹⁴ Defra, [Response to petition: Ban the exploitative import of young puppies for sale in the UK](#), 8 September 2020

[rules for pet travel](#). In the announcement, the Government stated that the only new requirement for travel to the EU will be the use of a health certificate instead of a passport. There has been no change to the requirements for animals entering Great Britain from the EU and Northern Ireland.

An [article on the Kennel Club website](#) (one of the UK's leading dog health, welfare and training organisations) summarises the rules for non-commercial pet imports as follows:

Following 1 January 2021, the UK Government now possesses the ability to set import rules into Great Britain (GB), although these are currently the same as the requirements that were in place prior to the end of the transition period.

As a result of the Northern Ireland (NI) Protocol, NI remains fully within the EU PETS system. Therefore, at present, the rules for importing a dog into GB and NI from outside of the UK remain aligned. The following rules apply to dogs being imported into GB from outside of the UK*, and for import into NI (including from GB):

All pets must be microchipped and vaccinated against rabies. Vets will require proof that the pet is at least 12 weeks of age upon vaccination, and travellers from the EU and certain other countries (including GB for import into NI) will be required to wait 21 days after the primary vaccination before travel – puppies from these countries will have to be at least 15 weeks of age before importation. Pets entering from a 'non-listed' third country must pass a blood test 30 days after their initial vaccination, followed by a three month wait. Depending on the country of origin, dogs must also receive tapeworm treatment no more than five days before travelling.¹⁵

A Commons Library paper on [Brexit and Pet Travel](#) contains further information.

2.2 Illegal trade in puppies

Puppy smuggling has received increased attention in recent years. Since 2014, Dogs Trust has been publishing reports on the state of puppy smuggling using cases studies and under cover reports. The most recent of these was [published in 2020](#). In its most recent report, investigating online puppy adverts, the youngest advertised imported puppy was only 7 weeks old.¹⁶

A report published in 2016 by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Animal welfare in England: domestic pets](#), called for "increased working between government agencies and charities to understand how the puppy smuggling trade works and how to reduce it effectively."¹⁷

In 2019 an Efra [inquiry into puppy smuggling](#) was initiated however it was drawn to an early conclusion due the General election. In 2020, further to this inquiry, the Efra Committee put out a [call for evidence](#) on

¹⁵ The Kennel Club, [Puppy Imports](#), Accessed 28 May 2021

¹⁶ Dogs Trust, [Puppy Smuggling: Puppies still paying as Government delays](#), 2020 p4

¹⁷ Efra Committee, [Animal welfare in England: domestic pets](#), 2 November 2016

puppy smuggling, however the Committee also stated that it would consider looking at a broader range of topics including:

- the extent of the problem of puppy, kitten and other companion animal smuggling; and Government statistics on this issue (including their accuracy and timeliness);
- the latest on smuggling, including the impact of COVID-19 on supply and demand, and the effectiveness of enforcement;
- the impact of recent measures including Lucy’s Law and the “Petfished” campaign, and what other measures should be taken;
- the end of the Brexit transition period and the impact on pet travel requirements, plus the situation regarding the NI Protocol and also GB’s involvement in the EU’s PETS scheme;
- COVID-19 and the impact on the companion animal welfare sector including the finances and demand for services of the charitable sector, and Government support.¹⁸

On 24 November 2020, the EFRA Committee took [oral evidence on pet smuggling \(HC 926\)](#). The committee took oral evidence from Paula Boyden, Veterinary Director of Dogs Trust, Dr Jennifer Maher from the University of South Wales, and Daniella Dos Santos the Senior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association.

Asked how the scale of pet smuggling had changed during the pandemic, Paula Boyden of Dogs Trust expressed concerns about the increased number of commercially imported puppies, and gave the following response:

During the current pandemic, we know that there has been a significant increase in individuals buying dogs. This is perhaps because they are now working from home and they feel that their lifestyle is such that they can accommodate dogs into their lives. A couple of things have happened as a result of that. The average cost for a lot of dogs has skyrocketed. Some information that we have had from a group called Tech4Pets has indicated that prices for some of the popular breeds, such as pugs, chows, dachshunds and French bulldogs have gone up in the region of 70%.

In terms of illegal importation, we know that dogs coming into the UK, or more specifically Great Britain, under the pet travel scheme decreased significantly during lockdown, as we would expect, because of the restrictions placed on to human movement. However, the numbers of what we call ITAHCs, which are health certificates issued for commercial movement, really have skyrocketed. We would normally expect that the month in which most imports would come into the UK would be around October, which would tie in with the Christmas market. However, May was just a little below October last year. Since then, the numbers have continued to increase.¹⁹

The full transcript of the oral evidence session is available to [read here](#) and a video of the session can be [viewed here](#).

¹⁸ Efra Committee, [Call for evidence: Pet Smuggling](#)

¹⁹ Efra, [Oral evidence: Pet smuggling, HC 926](#), 24 November 2020

The Committee also received [written evidence from Defra](#) which provided further information on commercial and non-commercial movements of pets into Great Britain during the pandemic, It highlighted increases in interceptions of non-compliant puppies that require quarantining compared to 2019:

Compared to 2019 there has been an increase in the intelligence led interception of vehicles carrying or suspected to be carrying puppies, both under the Pet Travel Scheme and also commercially. Consequently there has been an increase in the number of noncompliant puppies discovered which have been required to be housed in quarantine until they become compliant, demonstrating that the collaborative work between operational partners to disrupt illegal imports and prevent the entry of non-compliant animals has had a positive impact at an operational level.²⁰

Campaigns to Reduce Puppy Imports

In addition to the reports and campaign from Dogs Trust a number of other animal organisations are raising awareness of the problems associated with importing puppies.

The Kennel Club is currently running a campaign on [puppy imports](#). Outlining the issue on its website, the Kennel Club states that:

Importing young puppies into the UK raises a number of important concerns regarding animal welfare and exploitation, including transporting conditions, puppy farming, and illegal smuggling. Breeders in the United Kingdom (UK) have been unable to meet skyrocketing levels of UK demand, with recent legislative changes not helping the situation further and importers rushing to fill this gap.²¹

The Kennel Club has set out three measures that it believes would help address the issue. These are:

- Reduce numbers of imported puppies
- Tougher penalties
- Review of domestic breeding regulations²²

The RSPCA is also running a campaign to [stop puppy imports](#). Its website providing puppy import facts states that “there are numerous hidden risks involved with puppy imports, including disease, behaviour problems and premature death. For the owner, an imported puppy can cost thousands in vet fees and more in emotional distress.” It also highlights a recent survey conducted by the organisation between 13 and 15 November 2020 which shows that:

- 52% of UK dog owners surveyed agree that puppies and dogs should not be imported from other countries outside the UK under any circumstances.
- Seven in ten (69%) UK adults agree that there should be greater control on how many imported dogs are allowed into the UK.²³

²⁰ [Written evidence submitted by Defra \(PS0009\)](#)

²¹ The Kennel Club, [Puppy imports](#), Accessed 28 May 2021

²² The Kennel Club, [Puppy imports](#), Accessed 28 May 2021

²³ [HL15020](#), Answered on 29 April 2021

Latest from Government

In April 2021, the [Government was asked](#) “what plans they have to raise the minimum age for puppies being imported to the UK to six months in order to deter the trade in underage puppies; and whether they will ban payments in cash for puppies imported to the UK.”²⁴ The response given on 29 April 2021, stated that:

The end of the transition period has opened up new opportunities for managing our own pet travel and commercial importation rules. We are actively listening to the concerns of stakeholders and the Government is considering options to strengthen our efforts to tackle puppy smuggling and prevent the low-welfare importation and movement of these animals, including looking at the minimum age of dogs entering Great Britain (GB).

These options will take into consideration the results from our latest disease risk assessments for GB, recommendations of stakeholders such as the British Veterinary Association and Dogs Trust, and recent Parliamentary work from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.²⁵

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published its [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#) on 12 May 2021. This set out a number of areas where there would be legislation, including the number of dogs that could be imported and the minimum age for importation:

We committed to cracking down on puppy smuggling in our manifesto and we will legislate to:

- Reduce the number of pet dogs, cats and ferrets that can be moved under the pet travel rules which apply to non-commercial movements, in order to prevent unscrupulous traders from exploiting our pet travel rules.
- Bring in powers which enable us to go further, to:
 - Increase the minimum age that dogs can be non-commercially moved or commercially imported into Great Britain.
 - Restrict the ability of unscrupulous traders to move heavily pregnant dogs into Great Britain both commercially and noncommercially.
 - Prioritise the health and welfare of dogs by prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping or tail docking, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.

2.3 Further reading and useful links

Petition 326261, [Ban the exploitative import of young puppies for sale in the UK](#)

²⁴ [HL15020](#), Asked on 16 April 2021

²⁵ [HL15020](#), Answered on 29 April 2021

Parliamentary information

Parliamentary Question: [Dogs: Smuggling](#)

Asked by: Pollard, Luke

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the post-rabies vaccination wait time from the three to 12 weeks before which a puppy can enter the UK, to further reduce puppy smuggling.

Answering member: Victoria Prentis

| Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government takes the issue of puppy smuggling and other illegal importations of pets very seriously. It is an abhorrent trade which causes suffering to animals and puts the health of pets and people in the United Kingdom at risk.

On 12 May 2021 the Government published its Action Plan for Animal Welfare (APAW). This is a wide-reaching and ambitious plan to set out our current and future work on animal welfare and conservation.

The Government has a manifesto commitment to crack down on puppy smuggling and one of our key reforms in the plan is to end the abhorrent, cruel practice of puppy smuggling and low-welfare pet imports.

We are planning to bring in powers which enable us to that will allow us to prohibit the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices. This could include increasing the minimum age that dogs can be non-commercially moved or commercially imported into Great Britain.

HC Deb 01 June 2021 | PQ 5264

Current Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry, [Pet Smuggling](#) see [written evidence](#)

News and campaigns

Dogs Trust report December 2020 [Puppy Smuggling: Puppies still paying as Government delays](#)

RSPCA [Stop puppy imports](#)

Pet Business World 21 March 2021 [Puppy imports soar during lockdown](#)

BBC News Online 4 June 2020 ['Stop and think' before buying dogs from abroad, says vet](#)

[Petfished](#) campaign

3. Ear Cropping

There is currently a parliamentary petition to [stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK](#). The petition closes on 24 August 2021 however on 28 May 2021 it had received 103,986 signatures. The petition sets out that despite being illegal in the UK the practise is still widely evident and often carried out without anaesthesia or pain relief. The petition also highlighted reports from the RSCPCA which show a “621% increase in reports of ear cropping from 2015 to 2020.”

We believe a rise in UK celebs sharing images of their cropped dogs on social media is helping to fuel this. While illegal to crop in the UK, it's not illegal to sell ear-cropped dogs, import them from abroad or take dogs abroad to be cropped. These loopholes act as a smokescreen for those illegally cropping in UK. We call on the Government to close these loopholes and end the trend in ear-cropped dogs for good.²⁶

3.1 What is ear cropping?

An [online blog article](#) from the British Veterinary Association (BVA), a membership organisation for veterinary professional explains the practise of ear cropping:

Ear cropping is a surgical procedure where the floppy part of a dog's ear is cut off, often without anaesthesia or pain relief. In many cases, the ear stump is then attached to a hard surface in a process known as splinting, to 'shape' them upright whilst they are healing.

Ear cropping is carried out purely for cosmetic reasons, to make dogs look 'harder' or 'tougher'. I want to be clear that there is no benefit to the dogs involved. In fact, it severely compromises their welfare. The procedure itself is painful, as it cuts through cartilage, and it can take weeks to heal, with pain every time the bandages are changed. There's also a risk of the puppy catching an infection during the process.

Some people claim there are health benefits to ear cropping, but these are simply not true. Ear cropping does not improve a dog's hearing or prevent ear infections. Many of the breeds that have their ears cropped, such as Dobermans and American bulldogs, are not those we would consider at an increased risk of infection.²⁷

In an article published online, the RSPCA's dog welfare expert, Dr Samantha Gaines explained why ear cropping is detrimental to dogs:

Ear cropping is painful and completely unnecessary. Despite what some breeders will claim, cropping a dog's ears does not benefit them in any way. It can be detrimental to their health, behaviour and welfare in the short-term and in the long-term.

Dogs have their ears cropped for one reason and one reason only; to achieve a certain 'look'. In short, it makes them look tougher, more intimidating. Historically, breeds such as Dobermans had their ears cropped as puppies and then splinted - taped to bits of wood or cardboard - to make their ears grow upwards instead of

²⁶ Petition, [Stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK](#),

²⁷ BVA, [Why an alarming new trend has vets saying, 'Cut the crop!'](#), 11 January 2021

leaving them to go floppy. Now, we tend to see breeds such as American bullies having their whole ears removed.

Dogs are being put through this painful process simply to make them look a certain way. It's entirely for the owner's taste and could affect the dogs for the rest of his or her life.²⁸

On the question of how dogs with cropped ears are still on the increase in the UK despite the practise being illegal, the BVA states that:

One explanation is that dogs with cropped ears are being imported from countries outside the UK where the procedure is still legal. Another is that dogs bred in the UK are being deliberately taken overseas for the procedure.

We know there will be some cropped rescue dogs being given a new home in the UK, or families who own cropped dogs relocating here. But these are small numbers, and our concern is that these excuses are being used as a veil by unscrupulous sellers. A lot of the cases we see in practice are very young puppies – so they are either being moved illegally (the legal import age is 15 weeks) or buyers and vets are being lied to.

Recently it's come to light that unscrupulous breeders are carrying out this abhorrent procedure illegally in the UK, using crude instruments or DIY ear cropping kits bought online, likely without any anaesthesia or pain relief. And for what? A tough looking dog with little regard for the pain and suffering it causes them.²⁹

3.2 Existing Legislation

The Government's response to the petition was given on 9 March 2021 and set out the relevant legislation:

Under section 5 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 Act it is an offence to carry out certain surgical procedures, unless they are specifically exempted under The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 (the 2007 Regulations). The cropping of dogs' ears is not exempted under the 2007 Regulations and consequently is prohibited in England. Similar legislation applies in Scotland and Wales.³⁰

The Government's response also set out the maximum sentence at the time for causing unnecessary suffering to an animal or cropping a dog's ears was up to 6 months imprisonment. However, the Government also stated that plans were in place to increase this to 5 years. On 29 April 2021, the [Animal Welfare \(Sentencing\) Act 2021](#) was passed, amending the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and increasing the maximum sentence to 5 years. A [Commons Library briefing](#) provides further information on animal welfare sentencing.

Additionally, the Government set out other legislation and measures in place designed to help tackle the issue of ear cropping in dogs:

Equally, the Government has powers to intervene on animal welfare grounds. Importers of animals must adhere to welfare standards as set out in Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and in domestic legislation,

²⁸ RSPCA, [End ear cropping: Dogs need their ears - and here's why](#),

²⁹ BVA, [Why an alarming new trend has vets saying, 'Cut the crop!'](#), 11 January 2021

³⁰ Defra, [Response to petition: Stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK](#), 9 March 2021

The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 (WATEO). This legislation aims to protect the health and welfare of animals during transportation and applies to dogs that are suffering injury as a result of non-exempted mutilations.

The Government will engage with stakeholders, including the RSPCA, to understand the extent to which dogs are having their ears cropped in breach of the law in this country. Now the Transition Period has ended, we also have the opportunity to consider options regarding this abhorrent practice for imported dogs, in line with World Trade Organisation rules and would welcome further evidence from stakeholders and the public on this issue. The Government is taking steps to ensure that the illegal importation of pets is stopped, and that pets brought into the UK through legal means receive a high standard of care.

The Government also continues to raise awareness regarding the improper selling of pets by deceitful sellers in the UK and abroad through our 'Petfished' campaign, which seeks to educate prospective pet buyers on common tricks and tactics used by deceitful sellers which may result in the purchase of a mistreated or unwell pet including those who have been subject to cropping. The campaign urges buyers to mitigate risks, for example by buying from trusted sellers such as those under the Kennel Club's Assured Breeder scheme, viewing puppies with their mothers and siblings, asking questions of the seller and following the Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA Puppy Contract to ensure that puppies are in good health when purchased.³¹

3.3 Proposal to ban imports of ear cropped puppies

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published its [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#) on 12 May 2021. This set out a number of areas where there would be legislation, including the number of dogs that could be imported, increasing the minimum age for importation, and banning the import of cropped puppies. The Government plans to:

Prioritise the health and welfare of dogs by prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping or tail docking, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.

3.4 Further reading and useful links

Petition 574305, [Stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK](#)

Gov.UK information

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), 12 May 2021

See p14:

³¹ Defra, [Response to petition: Stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK](#), 9 March 2021

We committed to cracking down on puppy smuggling in our manifesto and we will legislate to:

[...]

- Prioritise the health and welfare of dogs by prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping or tail docking, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.

Parliamentary information

Parliamentary Question [Dogs: Animal Welfare](#)

Asked by: Sultana, Zarah

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the steps the Government is taking to implement the ban on ear cropping dogs in the UK.

Answering member: Victoria Prentis |

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is currently an offence in England and Wales to carry out a non-exempted mutilation e.g. where it is not carried out for medical purposes, including the cropping of a dog's ears. The procedure is considered unnecessary and compromises the animal's welfare. Once the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 comes into force on the 29 June 2021, anyone convicted of such an offence faces being sent to prison for up to five years, or receiving an unlimited fine, or both.

This strengthened penalty sends a clear message that animal cruelty will not be tolerated and will enable our courts to take a firmer approach to cases of illegally cropping a dog's ears and other forms of cruelty such as dog fighting, abuse of puppies and kittens, or gross neglect of farm animals.

On 12 May 2021 the Government published its Action Plan for Animal Welfare. This is a wide-reaching and ambitious plan to set out our current and future work on animal welfare. The Government has a manifesto commitment to crack down on puppy smuggling and one of our key reforms in the plan is to end the abhorrent, cruel practice of puppy smuggling and low-welfare pet imports. We are planning to bring in powers that will allow us to prohibit the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.

HC Deb 28 May 2021 | PQ 4718

News and campaigns

RSPCA [End ear cropping: Dogs need their ears - and here's why](#)

Battersea Dogs' and Cats' Home press release 8 March 2021 [Butchered for fashion: Battersea reports a worrying increase in dogs with cropped ears](#)

British Small Animal Veterinary Association 25 February 2021 [Leading vets back petition calling for an end to cruel ear cropping practice](#)

British Veterinary Association 11 January 2021 [Why an alarming new trend has vets saying, 'Cut the crop!'](#)

Dogs Today Magazine 22 September 2020 [Cropping? Cut it out](#)

BBC News Online 25 January 2020 [Ear cropping warning after celebrity dog breeder found guilty](#)

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