



Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk

Response to Animal cruelty and third-party sales (Parliamentary debate) – April 2017

Thank you for contacting me about animal welfare.

I was unable to attend the debate in the House of Commons on 30 March owing to other pressing commitments on behalf of my constituents, but I understand it was a valuable opportunity to discuss these issues.

As you know, the debate focused on a recent report by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and in particular on the issues of sentencing for animal cruelty offences and pet sales by third parties.

The Government responded to the Committee's recommendations in full, noting the conclusions of its recent consultation on introducing a new Animal Activities License. Under its proposals, anyone breeding and selling three litters or more within twelve months will need to be licensed by their local authority, as will anyone breeding commercially. This should take the number of people in England who need a licence from 600 to around 5,000.

I am concerned that a ban in third-party sales would be extremely difficult to enforce. It would require local authorities, already under pressure to enforce licensing requirements, to expend further resources verifying that all sales to end customers were being handled directly by the breeder. There is also concern that such a ban would drive sales onto the black market, which would be worse for the animals involved.

When sentencing in cases of animal cruelty the courts must decide what penalty should apply in each case, taking into account its circumstances and the Sentencing Council's guidelines. Currently, in addition to the maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine, the courts can also disqualify offenders from keeping animals. While this issue is kept under review, recent experience does not suggest that the courts are finding their current sentencing powers inadequate.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP