Dear Graeme,

Following the introduction of the Bill to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses to Parliament today, I am writing to inform you and your Committee members of further animal health and welfare commitments to address matters of continuing public concern in Scotland. These will be announced tomorrow.

First, the regulations to permit the shortening of the tails of Spaniel and Hunt Point Retriever puppies to provide for the welfare of working dogs of these types will be laid in Parliament on 12 May. I look forward to providing evidence to the Committee on this in the near future.

Second, the Scottish Government intend to bring forward regulations to require the registration and licensing of animal sanctuaries, rescue centres and rehoming activities. I expect this legislation to be ready for consideration by the Committee before the end of 2017, after due consultation.

Third, the legislation concerning the breeding and dealing of dogs, cats and rabbits will be reviewed, to consider how more appropriate registration and licensing requirements can be introduced. Allied to this will be a focus on improving public awareness of the risks involved with the purchase of a pet and on how to promote information that informs prospective pet owners of their welfare responsibilities.

Fourth, the Scottish Government intends to bring the legislation on performing animals up to date to protect the welfare of animals used for public performances or display in circumstances other than circuses.

Finally, work is progressing on developing regulations on the use of electronic training collars for animals, to permit the use of any collars that can cause aversive sensations (i.e. electric pulse, sonic and spray collars) only under the guidance of an appropriately accredited trainer or a veterinary surgeon. Discussion continues with stakeholders from the pet industry, animal training and animal welfare sectors on the precise arrangements for approving trainers and how they will supervise the responsible use of training collars.
Any proposed regulations arising from these commitments will be secondary legislation under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2016. As previously announced, the Scottish Government also remains committed to reviewing the offences and penalties in this Act. Proposals for future public consultation on this will be brought forward in due course.

I look forward to working with you as work progresses on these initiatives; and I hope this indication of intentions is helpful to you.

Roseanna Cunningham