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Finlay Carson
Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

31 October 2023

Dear Convener,

Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill

Thank you for your letter of 25 October subsequent to my offer to provide further information on matters raised during the evidence session on the same date.

The Scottish Government's view on the scope of Part 1 of the Bill being limited to pet dogs, rather than all dogs, and the lack of definition of a pet in the Bill.

The Scottish Government's view is that the scope of Part 1 of the Bill should extend to all dogs regardless of the purpose for which they are kept. It agrees with comments raised by the stakeholders in the evidence session that took place on 20 September and the written responses received by the committee that it would not be too onerous to extend the scope to all dogs.

The current Scottish Government code of practice for the welfare of dogs extends to all dogs.

Scottish Government funding for public awareness campaigns to promote dog-related animal welfare.

There is no specific ongoing annual budget for Scottish Government animal welfare awareness campaigns. Previous awareness campaigns have been funded from the overall Agriculture and Rural Economy budget. Decisions on funding such campaigns are informed by need and whether or not there are issues which would benefit from such a campaign. You will recall that between 2018 and 2021, there were a number of issues relating to puppy welfare, not least the increase during the pandemic of families seeking to buy a pet and the importance of encouraging people to do so safely.

In 2018-19 the Scottish Government puppy campaign had a budget of £300 000. £225 000 of this was for 'paid for media' and overall development of the campaign and the remaining £75 000 was to cover insight and evaluation. The *Buy A Puppy Safely* campaign aimed to help people source their new puppy responsibly by informing them of the consequences of

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illegal puppy farming, arming them with knowledge of the warning signs to look out for and directing them to the "buy a puppy safely" website - [Animal Welfare Site \(buyapuppysafely.org\)](https://www.buyapuppysafely.org).

This campaign achieved strong success in reaching the target audience, and highlights included:

- 86% claimed to understand the risks of sourcing a puppy from a puppy farmer (target: 84%)
- 88% claimed they would make the right checks on puppies if purchasing a new pet (target: 75%)
- Increased awareness (up to 10 percentage points) amongst the target audience of specific risks of buying from a puppy farm
- 60,159 unique visits to the website during the campaign period, with an average dwell time of 14 minutes
- 20% of all calls to the Scottish SPCA Animal Helpline in 2018 were made during the campaign period; an increase of 138% over the previous period.

In 2019-20 the Scottish Government campaign had a budget of £222 000. £200 000 of this was for "paid for media", campaign development with the remaining £22 000 for insight gathering and campaign evaluation. This campaign built on the success of the *Buy A Puppy Safely* 2018-19 campaign.

This campaign also achieved strong success, and highlights included:

- 76% claimed to have seen or heard the campaign (target: 67%).
- 92% were aware of the 2+ signs of an illegally bred puppy highlighted in the campaign (target: 90%).
- 89% of those who've seen or heard the campaign reported to be encouraged to protect themselves from illegal puppy dealers (target: 88%).
- 85% were aware of two or more signs of buying from a puppy farm featured in the campaign (target: 87%).
- 70,000 unique visits to the website during the campaign period with an average dwell time of 7 minutes.
- During the campaign period, calls to the Scottish SPCA hotline were double the levels seen during the 2018 campaign period, and almost double the number in the preceding 8 weeks.

In 2020-21, the Scottish Government provided a grant of £135 000 to the Scottish SPCA which ran a campaign on our behalf. The campaign focussed on highlighting the unlicensed puppy trade, how to avoid buying from unlicensed sellers and key checks that potential puppy buyers should undertake. The decision to deliver a campaign through the Scottish SPCA instead of a Scottish Government led campaign was due to resourcing pressures, as communications about Covid 19 were being prioritised at the time.

Yours Sincerely

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