

MINUTE

Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare

Wednesday 4th December 2024 @ 17.30 (via MS Teams)

Present

MSPs

Christine Grahame MSP (SNP)
Maggie Chapman MSP (Scottish Green Party)
Colin Smyth MSP (Scottish Labour)

Invited Guests

Phil McKinnon, Association of Microchip Database Operators
Stefan Blakiston Moore, Cats Protection

Non-MSP Group Members

Alex
Amanda Doves
Ben Hunt, Animal Equality UK
Chris
David Field, Edinburgh Zoo
Edna Elliot-McColl
Elena Edwards, Animal Concern
Dr Elspeth Stirling, Scottish Badgers
Hannah Orr, SRUC
Henry Dixon-Clegg
Jacob Lloyd, Animal Welfare Investigations Project
Jane Stirling
John Burns, World Horse Welfare
Jordan McCay
Katie Maguire
Keith Marley, New Arc Wildlife Rescue
Kirsty Jenkins, OneKind
Leanne McPake, World Horse Welfare
Lee-Anne Howieson, Dogs Trust
Libby Anderson
Lynda Holton (Secretary)
Nicola White, Humane Society International/UK
Paul Reynolds, New Arc Wildlife Rescue / British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
Scott Fryer, Battersea
Zofia Bekas

Agenda item 1 – Apologies

Tess White MSP

Maurice Golden MSP

Dr Elizabeth Ormerod, Chair of The Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS)

Sarah Johnston, Edinburgh Dog & Cat Home

Jake Swindells, Countryside Alliance

Romain Pizzi

Dan Jarvis, British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Helene Mauchlen, British Horse Society

The Kennel Club

Georgie Hancock, The Humane League

Natalie Harney, Nature Watch

Agenda item 2

Minutes of last meeting approved – no amendments or objections.

Agenda item 3

Presentation: ‘Navigating the Microchip Database Network’ by Phil McKinnon, Association of Microchip Database Operators (slides provided for circulation with minutes).

Q&A

- Christine Grahame MSP: suggested combining microchipping databases with registration for dog ownership. Can she give Phil’s contact details to the Minister for Communities? A: yes.
- Libby Anderson: other countries are moving towards a single register – why are they doing this and not us? A: some countries have taken this approach when they have set up microchipping e.g. Hungary’s single database run by the veterinary association.
- Jacob Lloyd, Animal Welfare Investigations Project: concerns about microchip databases owned by convicted puppy dealers making it onto certified list. Are you making it harder to set up a database? A: yes, can report to AMDO and they can escalate to DEFRA.
- Colin Smyth MSP: not sold on not having a single database. Will it definitely be one single point of search? A: for vets, etc they would only need a single SPoS but for customers they would need to access the individual database as it would be too complex to make this into a single point.
- Scott Fryer, Battersea: we are finding more foreign microchips as they can be bought in bulk online; important that whole animal welfare sector can identify where these animals should be. Scot Gov can access the consultation info gathered by DEFRA. A: key aspect of SPoS is to ensure no duplicate registrations.
- Christine: is there a role for certification to ensure it’s a genuine database? A: could use a kite mark or similar thing e.g. Europetmart.

Agenda item 4

Supplementary presentation: 'Microchipping of Pet Cats' by Stefan Blakiston Moore, Cats Protection.

- Only 72% of pet cats are microchipped in Scotland – 840k microchipped, 235k without – lowest rates in GB (75% in England, 74% in Wales).
- Hugely important to welfare orgs for reuniting/rehoming. Without a microchip it's very difficult to reunite with their owners.
- Top reason for not microchipping cats: 39% 'my cat doesn't go outside'.
- Microchipping of cats became compulsory in England June 2024. When it became compulsory for dogs there was an increase 75% to 92%; hoping the same will happen with cats and some cross-border impact. But needs to be compulsory in Scotland too.
- Code of Practice for Welfare of Cats recommends it and awaiting outcome of SAWC.
- Calling for compulsory microchipping of cats and a single point of search for microchip databases in Scotland.

Q&A

- Christine: noted that microchips can be used on your cat flap for security. When will SAWC report? A: not sure.
- Ellie, Scottish Badgers: previously took a petition to the Scottish Parliament on welfare of wildcats and domestic cats.
- Keith Marley, New Arc Rescue: question re farm cats and feral cats. A: no plans to include these at present.

Agenda item 5

MSP Update

Colin Smyth: paid tribute to the late Eddie Palmer, Chair of Scottish Badgers who recently passed away. Ban on use of snares – gathering outside Parliament recently to mark this. Acknowledged the hard work getting to this point. Awaiting several Members' Bills progressing so a bit of a lull on that front at the moment. Keeping an eye on land reform legislation.

Christine Grahame: Welfare of Dogs Bill at stage 3 and progressing. Wants to meet dog wardens to discuss issues around training and support. Where are we with shock collars? Not law yet. Christine will follow this up. Tried to reject the XL Bully legislation and failed. Has been putting down several Written Parliamentary Questions on the subject. Asked about stink pits? Libby Anderson advised these are associated with snares which are now banned but worth checking.

Maggie had to leave early but have asked her for written update.

Agenda item 6 – Next meeting

British Horseracing Authority re equine welfare (agreed at last meeting but couldn't make today so will present at next meeting).

Other proposed speakers for discussion:

1. Suggested by Christine Grahame: **National Dog Warden Association** regarding training and lone working for Dog Wardens – discussed and agreed this could be one for the future but not for the next meeting.
2. Suggested by Maggie Chapman to discuss animal testing: **Camp Beagle** and/or **East Lothian Uncaged** – discussed and agreed this would be of interest as not something the CPG has had presentation on before. However, it was suggested by Hannah Orr, SRUC, that we also invite a representative from the Home Office/legislative side to attend in order to balance the discussion.
3. Approached us: **The University of Glasgow - Dr Ilyena Hirskyj-Douglas**, Lecturer at School of Computing Science, on her work on providing interactive computer systems for pets and animals. Ilyena's work has designed systems that give highly social animals agency over their environment by allowing them to communicate with animals in other zoos – discussed and agreed that members needed more information before agreeing request to present. Further information on Ilyena's work is available here: <https://ilyena.com/>

Discussion on whether to hold meeting hybrid or online only going forward. Agreed to hold a couple of meetings per year in hybrid format to enable those who wish to attend in person to do so.

Feedback from Edinburgh Dog & Cat Home that holding meetings in evenings can be tricky as outside of normal working hours. However, it was noted that if meetings are to be held on Parliamentary business days (Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays) it has to be evenings to allow MSPs to attend as committees sit in the mornings and chamber business runs in the afternoons. Mondays and Fridays are also not ideal as MSPs have constituency business these days (MSP attendance is a priority to ensure meetings are quorate).

Agreed date of next meeting: Wednesday 5th March 2025 at 6pm (online only).

Agenda item 7 – AOB

Monica Lennon MSP's proposal for an Ecocide (Prevention) (Scotland) Bill is still open for MSP signatures (until next Wednesday). Given that this overlaps with many animal welfare issues, Monica felt it was important to bring to the attention of CPG members.

Question raised re media reports that dogs are now required to be on a leash in parts of London. Amanda Doves asking if this measure is likely to be introduced in Scotland. Scott Fryer's view was that this was very unlikely.