

7 February 2012

Joint BVA-NIVA-AVSPNI-BSAVA Response to the DARD Consultation on the Draft Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations

1. The British Veterinary Association (BVA), the Northern Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA), the Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI) and the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.
2. The BVA is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom and has over 13,000 members. Its primary aim is to protect and promote the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and it therefore takes a keen interest in all issues affecting the veterinary profession, be they animal health, animal welfare, public health, regulatory issues or employment concerns. NIVA is a territorial division of the BVA.
3. Between them, NIVA and AVSPNI represent vets working in all areas of the profession in Northern Ireland, and as such are well placed to provide a consensus view on issues of concern to veterinary surgeons.
4. The BSAVA is the largest specialist division of the BVA and of the veterinary profession. It represents approximately 6,500 members, the majority of whom are in general practice and have an interest in the health and welfare of small animals, namely dogs and cats.
5. We have considered the consultation paper and our responses to the questions posed are given below.

Question 1: Do you agree that a block licence for a premises will only be valid for dogs that are microchipped and any pups under 8 weeks of age? If no, please state why and supply evidence if appropriate.

6. We agree that a block licence for a premises should only be valid for dogs that are microchipped and any pups under 8 weeks of age, providing that the provisions of regulation 8, paragraph 2 apply. We believe that it is important that this exemption exists to cover circumstances where a veterinary surgeon judges that implantation (or continued implantation) would have an adverse effect on the health of a specific animal.

Question 2: Do you agree with the ISO technical specification of a microchip, the information to be recorded on the database and who may access the database? If not, please state your reasons.

7. We agree with the reference to the ISO technical specification within the definition of a microchip in regulation 9. The ISO standard 11784:1996 and Annex A to ISO standard 11785:1996 are the accepted standards across Europe.

8. The information to be recorded on the database appears to be logical. We stress however that the primary identification tool should be the microchip itself; if the dog has been microchipped at a young age it is possible that there will be some changes to patterns and colours as the animal matures. Similarly, with a crossbreed, for example, it can be difficult to predict what the animal's appearance will be as it grows, without knowing the parentage.
9. Regarding access to the database, we agree that the information should be available to enforcement officers on the production of authorisation or identification required by the database operator. It should be remembered that in addition to the information outlined in regulation 9, the database will also hold "hidden" historical data which are not normally available (e.g. previous owners). Consideration should be given as to whether access to this information needs to be detailed.
10. We note that although the consultation document refers to enforcement officers, there is no definition of an officer within the Regulations and we suggest that this should be clarified.

Question 3: Do you agree with the definition (in regulation 9(5)) of "a competent person"? If no, please state your reasons.

11. We agree with the definition of a competent person as described within the Regulations. However, where young animals are to be microchipped, training should specifically include the microchipping of young puppies. The reason for this is that young puppies are small and wriggly and their tissues are soft which makes placement of the microchip more difficult and increases the risk of injury. In a recent survey of BSAVA members from Northern Ireland, a number of respondents expressed concern over the skill of some implanters and redress for the owner if problems developed after microchipping. It is important that any injury caused by, or misplacement of a microchip is reported as an adverse reaction and BSAVA is encouraging its members to report such occurrences.
12. We suggest that a model training schedule similar to the guidance produced by the Microchip Advisory Group (MAG).

Question 4: Do you agree with the provisions for the powers of officers? If no, what do you disagree with?

13. We agree with the provisions for the powers of officers put forward in regulation 10. We believe that it is important that the powers are adequately enforced to ensure that the legislation is effective.

Question 5: Do you agree with the requirements for block licence holders to keep records for all dogs on their premises? If no, please state why.

14. In general we agree with these requirements, although it has to be recognised that owners may not know the date of birth of a dog if not home bred, e.g. a purchased stud dog.

Question 6: The draft conditions may incur minimal costs to block licence holders. These are referred to in the RIA which accompanies this document. If you have any comments please provide appropriate evidence based information.

15. We have no comment.