

BVA Policy position on pet travel

Executive summary

Introduction

BVA supports the regulation of pet travel - both commercial and non-commercial - that enables the safe and legal movement of pets. Any movements must ensure that animal health and welfare, and public health, are protected, and travel routes are not abused for purposes that negatively impact on animal health and welfare (eg puppy smuggling and the importation of stray dogs with unknown health histories).

Whilst the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) and the Balai Directive have made the transport of pets between the UK and mainland Europe easier and more cost effective, BVA supports the strengthening of commercial and non-commercial pet movement legislation to safeguard the health of the UK's animals and wider public and prevent unintended consequences to animal welfare through the circumvention of existing legislation.

The issue of the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border is a much wider issue than the movement of pet animals, although we do recognise that this is one of the major concerns for people on both sides of the border. The BVA position on pet travel therefore relates to the opportunities for a new legislative framework to replace the EU Pet Travel Scheme, allowing the UK to strengthen its rules to protect animal health and welfare. Movement of pet animals between two countries of similar disease status may be considered as part of future negotiations; our policy position does not seek to address this specific issue as so many of the border questions are currently unknown.

BVA Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The UK Government should negotiate for the UK to become a non-EU country from which pet passports are recognised with the Pet Travel Scheme.

Recommendation 2: The UK governments should ensure the provision of clear, consistent guidance as to the entry requirements that all pets travelling from EU member states, listed third countries and non-listed countries must meet before they are able to enter the UK and vice versa.

Recommendation 3: The UK Government should reintroduce compulsory tick treatments for all dogs and cats travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme. Consideration should also be given to reintroducing compulsory tick treatments for ferrets as per previous requirements under the Pet Travel Scheme.¹

Recommendation 4: The UK Government should introduce tapeworm treatment for cats as well as dogs under the Pet Travel Scheme. Consideration should also be given to reintroducing tapeworm treatments for ferrets as per previous requirements under the Pet Travel Scheme.²

Recommendation 5: To protect the UK's Echinococcus multilocularis (EM)-free status, the tapeworm treatment window of 24-120 should be shortened to 24-48 hours before entry into the UK from infected countries.

¹Defra, 2017. The Pet Travel Scheme. Advice to veterinary surgeons in GB: ferrets. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090731224433/http://www.defra.gov.uk//animalh/quarantine/factsheet/ukvetsferretfactsheet.pdf>

² Ibid.

Recommendation 6: The UK Government should extend the waiting time post-rabies vaccination to 12 weeks with the aim of minimising the risk of rabies incursion into the UK and simultaneously reducing illegal trade in puppies for sale via the non-commercial route.

Recommendation 7: To protect the UK's rabies-free status, the UK Government should restrict the movement of dogs from countries with high rabies risk in terrestrial animals and reintroduce the rabies titre test as a mandatory requirement before travel.

Recommendation 8: To reduce the risk of importation of disease endemic in other countries, the UK Government should restrict the movement of stray dogs from countries which are endemic for diseases not currently considered endemic in the UK eg. brucellosis, babesia, ehrlichia, dirofilarial, leishmania and introduce testing for any such diseases as a mandatory requirement for stray dogs before travel to the UK.

Recommendation 9: Consideration should be given to maintaining a comprehensive record of all port checks and diagnostic results to feed in to UK surveillance data on the diseases covered by PETS and those not considered as endemic for the UK eg. brucellosis, babesia, ehrlichia, dirofilarial, leishmania.

Recommendation 10: The UK Government should work to better enforce Pet Travel Scheme Rules to prevent the movement of dogs for the sole purpose of a change of ownership through non-commercial routes.

Recommendation 11: Prospective owners should be encouraged to rehome from the existing UK dog population and UK rehoming charities or welfare organisations.

Recommendation 12: The UK Governments should restrict the number of animals that can travel under the Pet Travel Scheme to five per non-commercial consignment rather than five per person (unless attending or training for a competition, show or sporting event where, in line with current legislation, written evidence of event registration must be provided).

Recommendation 13: Enforcement of the Pet Travel Scheme should be undertaken by Government agencies as opposed to carriers. This shift in responsibility should include a requirement for there to be sufficient out-of-hours and weekend cover at ports by Government agencies and the provision of veterinary delivered training or guidance to enforcement officers.

Recommendation 14: The verification procedure used at ports to check dogs entering the UK should be revised to ensure that an enforcement officer must see the animal when scanning the microchip and ensure microchips external to a dog are not scanned. For pets returning after shows, competitions or sporting events, their exit should be verified and import records reconciled, in the case of dogs by scanning their microchip and for all other pets, relevant paperwork is checked.

Recommendation 15: Regulation surrounding compliance inspections of commercial pet movements should be strengthened, including an increase in spot checks at ports.

Recommendation 16: Routes and mechanisms for reporting concerns about the illegal importation of animals and non-compliance with the Pet Travel Scheme should be more clearly defined, with improved accessibility out-of-hours.