

Public Petitions Committee
Room T3 40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

10 June 2015

Dear Ned Sharratt

PETITION PE1561 ON PET RABBIT WELFARE

The Scottish SPCA would like to thank the Scottish Parliaments Petitions Committee for the opportunity to comment on the above petition, lodged by Karen Grey on behalf of Rabbits Require Rights (Scotland).

The Scottish SPCA is the largest Animal Welfare Charity in Scotland and deals with all species of livestock, domestic and wild animals in Scotland and through our network of Animal Rescue and Rehoming Centre's, including our specialist Wildlife Centre, we care for more than 15000 animals per annum.

The Scottish SPCA is entirely funded by the generosity of the general public and receives no Government funding.

Scottish SPCA Inspectors are authorised by the Scottish Minister to enforce the welfare provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

The Scottish SPCA is of the opinion that all animals in the pet market should receive equal protection under the law to ensure that they are afforded at least the basic requirements stated in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) 2006 Act.

The Scottish SPCA does not seek a ban on ownership of any particular species of pet, but we expect owners to be in a position to provide any pet with everything required for that species, this includes appropriate knowledge of the species involved and the time and financial resources to do so.

The petitioner is correct in that there has been an increasing trend in Rabbits being neglected or abandoned, resulting in an increasing number being dealt with by rescue societies such as the Scottish SPCA and many others.



Part of the issue is education; the Scottish SPCA has probably the largest free education outreach programme in Scotland. Last year our Inspectors, Animal Rescue and Education Officers delivered to over 300.000 primary school children in Scotland. Part of the programme includes responsible pet ownership and includes some of the specific requirements for pet Rabbits.

Rabbits have long been seen as perfect cheap pets for children that are very easy to care for. Rabbits are regarded as an exotic species by the veterinary profession and can have quite complex health issues; part of the problem is that the cost of veterinary treatment for Rabbits far outweighs the initial cost of the Rabbit in the first place.

This whole area is covered by the Pet Animals Act 1951 which is overseen by Local Authorities, given that there are 32 Local Authorities in Scotland coupled with no National standards for Pet Shop licenses there can be a wide range of standards in the implementation of the Act.

Previously the Scottish SPCA assisted Highlands Council in inspecting and assessing Pet Shops within that area for licensing purposes.

The Licensing of Animal Dealers (Young Cats and Young Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2009 is mentioned in the background papers of the petition, while these Regulations are well intended they are widely ignored and hardly enforced by the Local Authorities.

The Pet Animals Act 1951 is over 60 years old and is not fit for purpose in the current age, pet ownership today is a world apart from the pet market in 1951, and The Scottish SPCA understands that the Scottish Government is currently reviewing all aspects of this legislation.

The Pet Animals Act 1951 (with a few exemptions for pedigree animals) covers all people in the business of supplying pets to the general public, this includes those who breed animals to supply the pet trade, as per the interpretation from the Act below:

References in this Act to the keeping of a pet shop shall, subject to the following provisions of this section, be construed as references to the carrying on at premises of any nature (including a private dwelling) of a business of selling animals as pets, and as including references to the keeping of animals in any such premises as aforesaid with a view to their being sold in the course of such a business, whether by the keeper thereof or by any other person:

Another growing problem is the issue of internet sales, which has virtually no regulation, the Pet Trade Industry believes that more than 50% of all animals sold as pets (of every species) is now sold via the internet as opposed to through Local Authority Licenced premises, again the Scottish Government is looking into this area, but it will be a very difficult issue to address.

Several codes of recommendation and practice in the care of several species have been issued by the Scottish and Westminster Government over the years, whilst these do not have the force of law; they are seen as a valuable educational reference.

The Scottish SPCA looks forward to working with the Scottish Government in shaping any new legislation in this very important area.

Yours sincerely

Michael Flynn

Chief Superintendent