



Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament / Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff
CF99 1NA

3 December, 2021

Dear Jack Sargeant MS,

Thank you for your letter to RSPCA Cymru concerning petition P-06-1200, entitled *'Make horse tethering, with or without shelter, illegal and an act of cruelty in Wales'*.

RSPCA Cymru has long highlighted issues with the practice of securing a horse, pony or donkey via a tether. The welfare problems associated with tethering are complex; shelter such as trees can cause animals to become entangled but open ground offers no protection from inclement weather, the sun or flies. A horse's natural behaviour of walking long distances to graze cannot be reproduced, they cannot escape attack by dogs and people, and they are not able to enjoy the natural company of other horses. As such, the RSPCA opposes tethering as we do not believe it to be a viable, long-term way to keep a horse.

However, while we acknowledge the noble aims of this petition; realistically, an outright ban on tethering is unlikely to be practical. There can be instances where an owner needs to tether a horse for very short periods of time, for example, and for this very short period can provide the rigorous monitoring and checks required, as well as access to food, water, shelter and grazing. Additionally, inappropriate tethering that does not meet the five welfare needs of the horse is already illegal as horse owners already have a duty of care to meet the five welfare needs of their horses at all times under the Animal Welfare Act (2006).

An outright ban could also displace problems related to equine welfare to other situations which are potentially damaging for welfare, including increased instances of fly-grazing or even abandonment. A ban could also result in horse owners leaving their animals free and unattended in inappropriate situations such as next to roads, leading to road traffic problems.

RSPCA Cymru continues to campaign to see a reduction in tethering. This could be achieved through a strengthening of the wording in the Welsh Government's Code of Practice around tethering, or an exploration as to whether a maximum time period on the tether should be introduced alongside existing animal welfare laws; or other legislative or regulatory solutions. We would urge the Welsh Government to acknowledge the strength of feeling on this issue, as highlighted by the response to this petition (P-06-1200) from the public, and to consider acting accordingly.

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However, as outlined in your letter, issues do exist in Wales with regards to practical enforcement - both in relation to inappropriate tethering, as this is already illegal under the Animal Welfare Act, and through the enforcement of other equine-related legislation, such as the Control of Horses (Wales) Act, which provides further powers for councils in Wales to tackle abandoned and fly-grazed equines. A timely review of the Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2019 will also be key - ensuring the law is helping to identify inappropriately tethered equines and, crucially, linking them to the people responsible for their care; aiding enforcement.

Local authorities are being tasked with enforcing an increasing number of animal welfare laws - with the UK's Kept Animals Bill, and future Welsh Government plans, set to expand this further. It is vital therefore the Welsh Government considers the financial situation for local authorities, and the importance of consistent enforcement - including in relation to equines, and the capacity of horse wardens.

Within its recently-published Animal Welfare Plan, the Welsh Government references the three-year training programme it has funded, to enhance its support for the training of local authority enforcement officers in relation to legislation on dog breeding establishments - and there is some suggestion this could be expanded to incorporate other areas related to animal regulation. This could include laws relevant to equines; and enforcement of legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act on tethering; the Control of Horses (Wales) Act with regards to abandoned and fly-grazed equines; and the Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2019 with regards to identification. While hot spots for some of these activities do exist in Wales - and the RSPCA routinely responds to calls regarding equine welfare in these areas, and liaises with the Council regularly - consistent enforcement across Wales is still key. However, beyond training, financial capacity is also an issue - which is why we continue to call for the Welsh Government to undertake a wholesale review concerning the ability of Local Authorities and other agencies to enforce legislation that impacts the welfare of animals.

If we can provide any further information on this, or other matters pertaining to animal welfare, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We look forward to working closely with you and the Senedd's Petitions Committee in the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. O'Brien'.

Chris O'Brien
Senior Public Affairs and Media Manager