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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-629
Ein cyf/Our ref RE/00510/15

William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
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15 July 2015

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 3 July, in response to my letter to you of 19 May, in which you seek views on further comments made by the Petitioner in respect of Petition P-04-629 - Review and Enforcement of the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014.

The Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014 was introduced in order to respond quickly to the significant fly grazing problem being experienced by local authorities across Wales. The Welsh Government listened to the views and evidence provided by the third sector, enforcement authorities and stakeholders when developing the Act. The powers provided are just one of a number of tools available to local authorities to combat fly grazing, straying and abandonment of horses and ponies.

I note that the petitioner, Ms Tamblyn, suggests that freeze branding should be a condition of having grazing rights. There are no statutory duties placed on Commons Associations or commoners that would make this a compulsory requirement, however there is nothing stopping Commons Associations from introducing such a requirement at their discretion. The Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2009 require all equines born after 1 July 2009 or issued with a first passport to be identified by way of a microchip but owners may in addition identify their horses with other visible methods such as freeze branding.

The New Forest has its management laid down by statute which provides for the election of Verderers and the employment of Agisters with powers and responsibilities for the management of Commoners' stock in the Forest. During the introduction of the Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2009 my officials visited the New Forest and met with the Verderers and Agisters to view the management systems with the aim of applying best practice to the semi-feral derogation implemented in Wales. Many of the New Forest procedures were adapted for use in Wales.

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Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, owners or people responsible for equines have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure the animal's welfare needs are met. The message is very clear, ownership of any animal brings with it responsibilities and a duty of care which is embedded in legislation, and anyone considering breeding animals needs to factor in the immediate and long term costs before making such a decision, including the costs associated with disease prevention and control.

I am aware of the contraceptive programme undertaken by the Society for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies in collaboration with the Common Land owners on the Gelli Gaer and Cefn Golau Commons. The aim of the programme, which to date has seen 200 mares being treated, is to reduce overbreeding and limit the suffering caused towards the mares by colts and stallions that also occupy the common. I look forward to seeing what can be learnt from this approach after foaling season in the spring of next year when the affect of the programme will be known.

Partnership working is key to the success in raising standards and compliance in animal health and welfare. The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework sets out the Welsh Government plan for continuing and lasting improvements in standards of animal health and welfare. Engagement between local authorities and, in particular, equine charities continues to develop to good effect. Meetings take place between various interested parties, welfare charities, commoners association and local authorities. The Welsh Government continues to promote partnership working and the sharing of resources as the best way forward.

Humane destruction is very much the power of last resort and those local authorities that have seized horses under the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014 have I understand made every effort to either return them to their owners or rehome them through recognised welfare charities.



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