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3 June 2010

Dear Mr Hoppe,

Re: Defra Consultation on dangerous dogs

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the current legislation relating to dangerous dogs and the options proposed by Defra as a means to improve the situation in England and Wales.

The following response is made on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the UK. The role of the RCVS is to safeguard the health and welfare of animals committed to veterinary care through the regulation of the education, and ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and nurses, thereby protecting the interests of those dependent on animals, and assuring public health. It also acts as an impartial source of informed opinion on relevant veterinary matters.

The RCVS welcomes the review of current legislation and strongly endorses the 'deed' rather than 'breed' approach to the control of dangerous dogs. This is largely because identifying that a dog is one of the breeds or types specified under the Dangerous Dogs Act is notoriously difficult. The RCVS considers that legislation in this field should seek to protect the public against dogs that are dangerously out of control, whilst ensuring that the welfare of any individual dog is not compromised. To this end, the College ultimately considers that all breed-specific references should be removed from the legislation relating to dangerous dogs

The RCVS supports the compulsory microchipping of all dogs and considers that such a policy would have an important role to play in the control of potentially dangerous dogs, on the grounds that the accurate identification of an animal and its owner is crucial to the enforcement of legislation and to achieving successful prosecutions. Moreover, the RCVS considers that permanent identification would have a positive effect on animal welfare. I have enclosed the RCVS position statement on the 'Compulsory Permanent Identification of Dogs'. This paper provides further background as to the views of the RCVS on the benefits of compulsory microchipping.

In order to be effective, any legislation requiring the compulsory microchipping of dogs would need to be enforced. The RCVS does not consider that veterinary surgeons should be

expected to 'police' any policy of compulsory microchipping, as this could have a negative effect on animal health and welfare. If, for example, it were widely known that veterinary surgeons routinely scan all dogs coming into their practices to check for the presence of a microchip, it might deter those with dogs that are, for whatever reason, not microchipped, from taking their animals to a veterinary surgeon. If, therefore, compulsory microchipping were to be introduced it should not be the role of a veterinary surgeon to act as 'police officer' as to do so could adversely affect the relationship between veterinary surgeon and client. For the above reasons, the RCVS does not advocate the mandatory scanning of dogs entering veterinary practices. To provide further clarification on this point I have attached the RCVS position statement on 'The Routine Scanning of Dogs and Cats for Microchips'.

The RCVS also has concerns regarding the age at which dogs have microchips implanted and the training given to those responsible for implanting microchips. The RCVS considers that it is imperative that the veterinary profession is involved in the development of any legislation concerning the compulsory microchipping of dogs, in order to determine protocols for the age at which microchipping is performed. Furthermore, there is currently no legislation as to who can implant microchips in the UK. RCVS guidance states that microchipping should only be undertaken by a veterinary surgeon when it is via a method other than the subcutaneous route, ear tags or bolus. As dogs are microchipped subcutaneously there is currently no requirement for a veterinary surgeon to perform the procedure. However, poorly implanted chips can lead to severe injuries during implantation, increased risks of microchip migration and may have adverse effects on diagnostic techniques such as MRI. The RCVS therefore considers that if microchipping were to be made obligatory then appropriate standards of training for those charged with implanting microchips would need to be developed, through a process of thorough consultation with the veterinary profession.

If you require any clarification on the above comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. Alternatively, representatives from the RCVS would be happy to meet with you to discuss and expand upon our position.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Roberts
RCVS Policy and Public Affairs Officer

RCVS POSITION

MARCH 2010

COMPULSORY PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION OF DOGS

1. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) supports the compulsory permanent identification of all dogs, on the grounds that the accurate identification of dogs has a positive impact on animal welfare and may assist in the control of dangerous dogs. Microchipping is the predominant form of permanent identification and as such it provides the focus of this position statement. The RCVS, however, also acknowledges that other forms of permanent identification such as tattooing exist and are effective.

REASONS FOR SUPPORTING COMPULSORY MICROCHIPPING

2.
 - a. Microchip identification provides an accurate and efficient means of returning stray dogs to their owners and may also serve to reduce incidents of the abandonment or theft of dogs.
 - b. Microchipping puppies prior to sale could assist in identifying where dogs were bred and help to reduce the poor breeding practices that can lead to inherited defects and diseases. The 'indelible identification' of all puppies by 'microchip or other such equivalent system as may be developed' was one of the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding (2010) led by Professor Sir Patrick Bateson.
 - c. Permanent identification, such as microchipping, has an important role to play in the control of potentially dangerous dogs as the accurate identification of animal and owner is crucial to the enforcement of legislation and to achieving successful prosecutions.
 - d. Permanent identification could have a role to play in the control of an exotic disease, such as Rabies, should an outbreak occur. If, for example, all dogs were required to be microchipped, it could assist in the quick identification of vaccinated animals and the enforcement of restrictions on movement.
 - e. As a regulator, the RCVS recognises that the unequivocal identification of dogs is an essential part of correct certification.
 - f. Microchipping can assist veterinary surgeons by helping them to identify the animal being presented, retrieve clinically-relevant details and establish whether it is covered by pet insurance.

CONCERNS

3. Whilst in principle supporting the compulsory microchipping of dogs, the RCVS considers that there are certain issues that should be addressed before the implementation of legislation.
 - a. In order to be effective, any legislation requiring the compulsory microchipping of dogs would need to be enforced. The RCVS does not consider that veterinary surgeons should be expected to police any policy of compulsory microchipping as this could have a negative effect on animal health and welfare. If, for example, it were widely known that veterinary surgeons routinely scan all dogs coming into their practices to check for the presence of a microchip, it might deter those with something to hide from visiting. Moreover, if a dog is found to be registered with a different owner from the one presenting the animal this would raise the question of whose responsibility it would be to sort out the problem and whether a vet would be required to report this to the authorities - it is not the role of a veterinary surgeon to act as police officer and to do so could adversely affect the relationship between vet and client.
 - b. Microchips are, as the name suggests, very small (about the size of a large grain of rice) and the procedure of implanting the chip is generally considered to be safe and relatively painless, nevertheless animal welfare concerns have been raised regarding the implantation of the chips in young puppies and especially in small breeds of dog. It is imperative that the veterinary profession is involved in the development of any legislation concerning the compulsory microchipping of dogs, in order to determine protocols for the age at which microchipping is performed.
 - c. Poorly implanted chips can lead to severe injuries during implantation, increased risks of microchip migration and may have adverse effects on diagnostic techniques such as MRI scanning. Appropriate standards of training for those charged with implanting microchips must be developed, through a process of thorough consultation with the veterinary profession.

ENDS

For further information please contact:

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RCVS POSITION

OCTOBER 2008

THE ROUTINE SCANNING OF DOGS AND CATS FOR MICROCHIPS

The RCVS Advisory Committee considered the mandatory scanning for microchips in April 2003 and decided that it was not the role of veterinary surgeons to 'police' their clients.

The College's guidance to veterinary surgeons recommends that scanning should be carried out on any stray animals brought into the surgery, or those suspected of being stolen, or in cases where the owner is not aware if the animal has been chipped.

If a pet is found to be registered with a different owner from the one presenting the animal this would raise the question of whose responsibility it would be to sort out the problem – it is not the role of a veterinary surgeon to act as police officer.

The RCVS is also concerned that if it were widely known that veterinary surgeons routinely scan all dogs and cats coming into the practice, this might deter those with something to hide from visiting. This could have a negative impact on animal health and welfare.

Individual vets are free to set their own policies on microchip scanning and some may choose to make routine checks. However, for a vet to scan every new pet that came in to the practice, and to check this against the relevant database, might not be practical.

In addition, the databases of owner records held by microchipping companies might not always be up to date, so embarrassment could be caused to entirely innocent clients if pet ownership could not be proved.

On the rare occasions when such a client arrives with an animal that has a microchip registered in another person's name, both parties, with mutual consent, can be put in touch with each other.

However, if the client declines to consent to the release of his or her name and contact details, the *RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct* states that a veterinary surgeon may pass these details to the Petlog Reunification Service, even if this necessitates a breach in client confidentiality.

ENDS

For further information please contact:

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