

## Vets Warn of Risks of “Watering Down” Puppy Farm Legislation

Veterinary Ireland, the representative body for veterinary surgeons in Ireland, is concerned that recent calls from politicians to amend aspects of the Dog Breeding Bill could result in ineffective legislation that fails in its primary purpose – the safeguarding of animal health and welfare.

**Joe Collins**, President of Veterinary Ireland, states that his organisation has for many years been calling for legislation to control dog breeding, and especially the so-called “puppy farms”. *“Veterinary Ireland therefore welcomes the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government’s publication of the Dog Breeding Establishments Bill 2009 that is currently passing through the Seanad and the Dáil”,* he said.

According to Mr Collins, *“Ireland has become known as the “puppy farm capital of Europe”, exporting tens of thousands of puppies annually to the United Kingdom, where the breeding of dogs is now well regulated. The unregulated Irish trade contributes to an animal welfare nightmare for the RSPCA and other dog charities in the UK. Low quality, battery-bred Irish puppies exported to the United States have seriously damaged the reputation of Irish dog breeding in North America, too. Licensing and monitoring of the industry in Ireland is long overdue, to ensure that animal welfare standards are improved and to restore Ireland’s international reputation in this area”.*

The draft Bill has been carefully devised in conjunction with Local Authority vets who are faced with the day-to-day reality of dealing with the problem of unwanted dogs. The service which they provide must be better funded and must be backed up by legislation with teeth. The legislation will not have any impact on responsible individuals who breed small numbers of dogs as a hobby or as a small enterprise. Only larger scale breeders, with more than six breeding bitches will be liable to licensing and inspection. *“Additionally”* states Mr Collins, *“the new regulations will not be draconian, and those breeders who are already keeping dogs in reasonable living conditions, with adequate attention to the animals’ health and welfare needs, will have nothing to fear from their implementation”.*

Veterinary Ireland believes that the Bill, as proposed, has already been considered very carefully. It represents a moderate, measured approach to the regulation of this industry and will ensure due attention is paid to the animal’s welfare needs.

**Pete Wedderburn**, of Veterinary Ireland’s Companion Animal Society (VICAS), states that *“Vets are very concerned that any amendments that water down the Bill’s provisions in anyway may result in legislation that is impotent and potentially impossible to implement. For example, vets are concerned that the exemption sought for all the hunting kennels may lead to some breeding establishments using this guise in an attempt to evade the inspections that will become mandatory under the Bill. Furthermore, if the proposed penalties are reduced, the punishments will be so mild as to be meaningless”.*

Accordingly, Veterinary Ireland is calling for the Government to stand firm on this issue and act now to safeguard animal welfare. *“The proposed legislation has been drafted following extensive consultation and submissions from all interested parties, including the large scale dog breeders. As such, it already represents a balanced approach to addressing this important welfare issue for the dogs in our country”* states Mr Wedderburn.

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Veterinary Ireland represents veterinary practitioners in private practice and in Central and Local Government. We are happy to provide appropriately qualified and informed persons to contribute further to this debate in a constructive and reasoned manner.

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