



Marie Rimmer CBE, MP
Member of Parliament for St. Helens
South & Whiston
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 4847/01744 752075

Brachycephalic Animals:

I am aware these animals have become more popular pets in recent years. I also understand that these flatter features can cause many health concerns, such as breathing difficulties, spinal problems, skin conditions and dental and eye issues, and that these features are being bred to extremes by some breeders because they are perceived as cute.

Both licensed and unlicensed animal breeders are required to protect animals involved in breeding from harm and to provide for their welfare in line with good practice under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. I note the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 prohibits licensed breeders from breeding dogs if it can be reasonably expected that, on the basis of their genotype, phenotype or health, this would lead to welfare problems for the mother or the puppies. This applies in the case of brachycephalic breeds.

I support also introducing similar regulations which would apply to the breeding of cats, to ensure that breeders must also be licensed, and that cat welfare is consistently applied across the country. The Opposition raised this during the consideration of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill.

I am extremely disappointed the Government has now dropped the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. Over 18 months had passed since it was last scrutinised by Parliament and reassurances were given that it would be returned for further debate. The Government states it will instead take forward the Bill's contents as single-issue pieces of legislation, which I am concerned will further delay protections.

This decision is not what the public, our dedicated animal welfare charities or I want. It represents a profound setback for animal welfare in the UK, with innocent animals suffering the consequences. I supported an Opposition motion to bring back the Bill as written to Parliament, but the Government voted this down.

Strengthening our animal welfare laws is a priority and I will always support action to achieve the strongest possible animal welfare policies. All animals deserve protection and I believe it is wrong to promise tougher legislation if promises are then not seen through.

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Constituency Office:

Marie Rimmer CBE, MP, 2nd Floor, Century House, Hardshaw Street, St. Helens WA10 1QU, 01744 752075,
marie.rimmer.mp@parliament.uk
Website: www.marierimmer.co.uk