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Dog Fighting:

I recognise the concerns raised on the reported increase of dog fighting in our communities. Sadly, instances of dog fighting can be serious and organised cases of animal cruelty, ranging from informal street-based fights to highly organised 'pit' fights, where large sums of money may be gambled.

In England and Wales, dog fighting has been outlawed since the 1800s. Despite this, the RSPCA has recently highlighted rising numbers of reports - in 2022 the charity investigated 355 incidents, an increase from 232 incidents in 2019.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 sets out offences specifically for fighting, including knowingly publicising a fight, keeping premises used for a fight, and training an animal used in a fight. Those convicted of offences under this Act can be subject to disqualification orders, preventing from owning or keeping animals, as well as participating in the keeping of animals. Alongside dog fighting, these offences include causing unnecessary suffering, and mutilation such as dog ear cropping and tail docking.

Sadly, it is also the case that mutilation can go hand in hand with other forms of animal abuse, such as fighting, and may form a pattern of mistreatment. I want to see proper action on issues such as dog ear cropping, and laws that are not only tighter but are also properly enforced.

I believe it is vitally important to show that animal abuse will not be tolerated in this country. I welcomed the passing of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021. The Act increases the maximum penalties for some animal cruelty offences, including dog fighting offences.

I am aware of concerns raised over the need to enforce these laws. I remain committed to the hiring of an additional 13,000 neighbourhood police officers, getting police back on our streets and in our communities across the UK.

Strengthening our animal welfare laws is a priority. People want to see us go further on animal welfare than we have done, putting the health of our animals first and foremost.

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