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Sir Mark Hendrick MP
House of Commons
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Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your email of 30 October to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent, **Mr [REDACTED]**, expressing concerns about the latest Dogs Trust investigative report on illegally imported puppies into the UK via the Pet Travel Scheme (PTS). I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Defra takes the health and welfare of pets coming to the UK very seriously. I share your concerns about puppy smuggling, which is an abhorrent practice that abuses the PTS. We are determined to put an end to the puppy smuggling trade by adopting a zero tolerance approach to the misuse of the pet travel rules.

The latest Dogs Trust investigative report highlighted the activities of unscrupulous traders who use falsified passports that conceal the true age and country of origin of the puppies they import for sale in the UK. Not only does this cause significant welfare problems for the puppies concerned, this also presents a risk to the health of pets and people living here.

Since 2015, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) have worked together with Dogs Trust to increase enforcement at the border and target puppy smugglers. To date, 1,440 puppies have been intercepted at the border, and over 800 of these have been detained in quarantine, most frequently because they were too young to have received the proper pre-travel health preparations, as required by the PTS. Defra continues to develop plans to further tackle the illegal trade and has increased resourcing at major UK ports and launched an intelligence-led Task Force, consisting of national enforcement agencies such as HMRC, the Police and the RSPCA, to work on the issue.

I believe that many prospective owners are misled when purchasing a puppy and do not know the true origin of their pet. I appreciate the continued efforts that Dogs Trust and other charities make to raise awareness of this issue. Defra has also published guidance for individuals looking to buy a puppy, which highlights the illegal trade and advises buying from a reputable breeder, observing puppies with their mother and checking their documentation.

Defra is proposing a ban on commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens in England which would prevent the sale or rehoming of puppies under 6 months of age by anyone except the breeder or one of the UK's many animal welfare charities, and is considering whether a licensing scheme for rescue and rehoming centres is appropriate.

A Call for Evidence has concluded on these issues and we are currently analysing the results. We have also introduced new licensing regulations intended to drive up welfare standards for a range of activities involving animals, including dog breeding, which came into effect on 1 October.

Defra is engaged in a process of evaluating the risks to animal health and welfare that illegal imports of dogs pose, and developing long term strategies to better tackle them. We look forward to working with Dogs Trust on the evidence they have gathered to help inform our analysis and will continue to seek their input regarding plans to tackle the illegal trade.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

With best wishes,



DAVID RUTLEY MP