

# Consultation on proposed animal welfare policy reforms in Northern Ireland



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

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## Ministerial Foreword

My [Animal Welfare Pathway](#), which I published in May 2025, is recognition that advancing and strengthening animal welfare is a key priority for me and my Department.

As such, I have already taken forward a series of key reforms where change is clearly needed - reforms that should deliver meaningful improvements and increase protections for all our animals.

To date, I have introduced new pet theft laws; facilitated legal parity with the rest of the UK by agreeing that CCTV coverage be made mandatory in all areas of slaughterhouses where animals are kept; appointed an expert advisory group to bring forward recommendations on how dog breeding should be regulated here; and announced new rules on the sale and supply of puppies and kittens. Some of these initiatives are well embedded or on the cusp of being implemented.

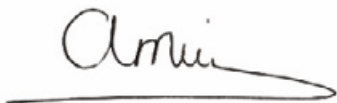
As these reforms continue, I want to now progress work on the remaining elements of the Pathway. I am conscious that the end of this Assembly term is fast approaching, so I am keen to seek views on the proposals contained within this consultation which will help to determine what the next steps are for these important proposals, and what can be achieved in the time that is left in this shortened mandate.

The proposals within this consultation complement and build upon identified areas for reform as outlined in the Pathway, and have the potential to create a strong, cohesive package of measures that can enhance and protect the welfare of all animals and dogs and cats, in particular.

However, I cannot deliver change to animal welfare alone. I am acutely aware that many of the proposals I am advocating require collaboration and partnership working, especially with councils. I also realise the weight of public expectation that councils face when new policies are announced. However, when I held my roundtable discussions, it was made clear to me

that standing still or doing nothing was not an option. A shared commitment and collective action will be needed for lasting change to take place.

I encourage everyone with an interest in animal welfare to take part in this consultation. Together, despite the complexities and constraints, we can take meaningful and proactive steps to further enhance and protect the welfare of all animals in Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Muir', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Andrew Muir MLA**

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

## Executive Summary

In 2024–25, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) engaged in a number of roundtable stakeholders' sessions with key partners including local councils, veterinary associations, agricultural organisations, and animal welfare charities to identify priority areas where welfare protections could be strengthened. This engagement highlighted the need to modernise several elements of the existing animal welfare framework to ensure it continues to reflect best practice, supports responsible animal ownership, and responds to emerging challenges. Following those discussions, Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, Andrew Muir, MLA, set out the priority areas for reform, as published in the [Animal Welfare Pathway- Advancing Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland 2025-27](#).

This consultation seeks views on proposed changes across four policy areas in addition to asking for feedback as part of a call for evidence on cat microchipping.

### Regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations

Rescue and rehoming organisations currently operate without formal regulatory oversight. The Department is proposing the introduction of a licensing regime to set uniform welfare standards, enhance transparency and accountability, thereby strengthening public confidence and protecting animal welfare. The contributions made by this sector are highly valued and consequently, the proposed measures are intended to be proportionate, ensuring compliance with animal welfare standards without introducing excessive bureaucratic burdens.

### Dog licence fees

The Department proposes an inflationary increase for licence fees to ensure that they remain appropriate, proportionate and reflective of councils' enforcement and administrative resource requirements.

## **Ban on specified aversive training devices**

The Department is proposing to ban the use of electronic shock collars, choke collars and prong collars, as these aversive training devices pose the greatest risk of misuse resulting in pain, fear or distress. The use of containment fences or boundary systems will not be impacted.

## **Strengthening microchipping requirements for dogs**

The Department proposes to enhance existing dog microchipping standards to require all dogs to be microchipped by eight weeks of age; to record breeder details where the breeder is also the keeper of the dog; and for keepers to update the database provider of any changes within 14 days. This will help ensure more consistent and accurate identification of dogs which will also support traceability.

## **Call for evidence on microchipping of cats**

There has been a growing call for the microchipping of cats to be made mandatory, as the presence of a microchip can improve reunification rates for lost and stray animals and strengthen owner accountability. The Department is seeking evidence on the advantages and disadvantages around compulsory cat microchipping, if this change was to be enacted in Northern Ireland.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is seeking views on the proposals as outlined above, which aim to enhance the welfare protections for companion animals. These proposals include regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations; banning specific aversive training devices; and enhancements to the current microchipping requirements for dogs. It also seeks evidence to inform future decisions around the mandatory microchipping of pet cats and feedback on a proposal to increase dog licence fees, which have not been uplifted since 2011.

The Department aims to supplement existing legislation or policy proposals which will deter the exploitation of animals through illegal breeding, selling, or providing pet services. These proposals will support the Department's previous announcements to:

- [regulate the sale and supply of puppies and kittens](#);
- review dog breeding regulations;
- mandate the use of CCTV in slaughterhouses; and
- promote responsible dog ownership and animal welfare.

The consultation is aimed at anyone who has an interest in animal welfare: stakeholders who work within the animal welfare sector; councils, which have responsibility for enforcement for companion animal welfare; the public; and any person or organisation involved in animal rescue and rehoming. The list of consultees (**Appendix 1**) is not meant to be exhaustive, and responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in, or views on, the matters covered by this consultation paper.

The consultation paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter two provides the context for companion animal welfare in Northern Ireland and the current legal protections afforded to them. Chapter three details the Department's proposals and sets out a series of questions on these proposals. Chapter four provides information on the Equality Impact Assessments, Rural Needs Impact Assessments, and Regulatory Impact Assessment exercises conducted. The Department welcomes any comments that consultees might have on any of these exercises. Chapter five outlines how to respond.

## Councils

The Department has engaged with district councils, as the enforcement bodies for non-farmed animal welfare and dog control via the stakeholder engagement sessions and through regular meetings and forums. This consultation now sets out the proposed policies and specifically welcomes detailed feedback, including any additional or alternative suggestions from councils to further inform final policy decisions.

After consultation, the Department recognises that if legislation is enacted to support some proposals, councils may gain updated statutory powers. The Department considers that councils are best placed to assess the impacts on its animal welfare service and detailed feedback is sought to refine the Regulatory Impact Assessments. As a matter of course, the Department remains committed to engaging with councils to address any challenges identified.

## Next steps

The consultation is being conducted using the online survey tool Citizen Space and will commence on **05 May 2026**. It will run for eight weeks closing on **30 June 2026**.

Following analysis of feedback received, the Department will publish a summary of the responses. Subject to the nature of those responses and following Minister's consideration, the Department will then take the steps to introduce legislation to give effect to the proposals. Please note that responses from groups will be considered as one response.

Evidence provided in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats will be used to inform a way forward.

## Chapter 2: Background

The Department has statutory responsibilities for the welfare of farmed animals under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. District councils play a central role as the Act gives them statutory responsibility for enforcing non-farmed animal welfare legislation, alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland which has responsibility for enforcement in relation to animal fighting.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 specifies that animal owners or keepers have a legal duty of care to ensure their animals' welfare needs are met. Under this Act the five needs of animals were enshrined in law: a suitable environment; a suitable diet; the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. The 2011 Act also made unnecessary suffering a criminal offence and provided the ability to impose a custodial sentence of up to five years where a person is found guilty of this offence, which was a UK first. The 2011 Act paved the way for regulations to protect animals from mutilations, regulate dog breeding and make specific protections for our service animals.

## Chapter 3: Proposals

### 1. Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations

Rescue and rehoming organisations provide a crucial service for animals throughout Northern Ireland. Many prospective pet owners opt to adopt their companion animals from rescue centres rather than purchasing them from breeders or pet shops.

These organisations deliver vital support for pets in need by ensuring they are cared for and by striving to ensure pets are rehomed with the right families, helping to secure a brighter future for each animal.

#### Current situation

Rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland are not subject to any regulatory requirements, unlike pet shops, dog breeding premises or boarding establishments, which must be inspected and licensed. In addition, there are no binding, uniform minimum standards governing how animals are kept or looked after when in the care of this sector. Nor is there a definitive register on the number of individuals or organisations which are rescuing and rehoming animals.

#### Need for change

While most of these are run by persons with the best interests of the animals at heart, there may be occasions when rescue and rehoming organisations lack the necessary skills, or space to properly care for the animals entrusted to them. Additionally, there is nothing to deter dishonest individuals in profiting from rehoming pets, and from situations arising where there are poor animal welfare practices.

Introducing new regulation could:

- help ensure that all organisations meet consistent, appropriate welfare standards;
- provide reassurance to the public and adopters about the quality of care animals receive;

- prevent individuals from misusing “rehoming” as a cover for unlicensed animal sales;
- help reduce the risk of disease entering Northern Ireland through imported animals; and
- improve transparency and accountability across the sector

The aim of any potential new system would be to support responsible organisations, improve welfare protections, and ensure suitable oversight where risks exist.

The Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), a representative body for dog and cat rescue and rehoming organisations across the UK, has established minimum welfare and operation standards. However, membership of ADCH is voluntary and only seven organisations based in Northern Ireland currently hold membership.

### **Position in other jurisdictions**

Scotland is currently the only part of the UK to regulate the rescue and rehoming sector. Since 2021, organisations that rescue or rehome animals, or operate animal welfare establishments, must hold a licence. The Scottish system focuses on ensuring that animals have:

- suitable accommodation
- a safe and appropriate environment
- a proper diet
- staffing and facilities appropriate to the number of animals kept

Scotland’s approach is designed to be flexible and avoid unnecessary prescription while still ensuring high welfare standards.

### **European Requirements**

Two pieces of European legislation are of significance to rescue and rehoming organisations.

Animal Health Law (AHL) requires organisations that move animals to other European Union (EU) member states to be approved by the competent authority. Approval includes meeting standards for biosecurity, isolation facilities, cleanliness and record-keeping.

The second is a proposed Regulation on the Welfare and Traceability of Cats and Dogs. The legislation currently progressing through final approval stages will require animal shelters to register with the authorities, ensure staff have appropriate training, provide regular veterinary oversight, meet welfare and enrichment needs, and ensure adopters receive relevant health information.

## **Proposal**

The Department considers that it is necessary to introduce minimum welfare standards for animals in the care of rescue and rehoming organisations across Northern Ireland. This would align with the approach to other animal related businesses and organisations, such as pet shops and animal boarding establishments.

A rescue and rehoming organisation which rehomes more than five animals within a 12-month period, or cares for eight or more animals (or five or more dogs) will be required to obtain a licence from the relevant council and must meet the associated licence conditions set out in the section below.

Additionally, all licensed organisations will be listed in a public register. The establishment of a register would increase trust in the sector, accountability, deter rogue operators and promote consistency and good practice across all organisations.

Applications will be processed and annual physical inspections performed by local councils with the fee for licence application set by the councils. Councils would also be required to publish a register of licensed centres. Veterinary practices and council-run dog pounds are outside the scope of the proposed regime.

The proposal is intended to be proportionate, ensuring animal welfare is safeguarded whilst not placing unfair or unattainable regulatory burdens on smaller rescue and rehoming organisations.

Charities that are already operating at a high standard will be relatively unaffected by the regulations; rather, regulation will help to highlight organisations that do not meet established standards and prevent rogue traders, puppy farms and puppy smugglers from masquerading as rehoming organisations.

## Licence Conditions

The proposed licence conditions are based on the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH) standards and broadly mirror those in place in Scotland. If, following this public consultation, a decision is made to bring forward legislation to implement this proposal, detailed guidance would be produced to assist with implementation.

### General

- The licence must always be clearly displayed at the premises. If the licence-holder has a website, the site must clearly show the licence-holder's name, licence number, and the issuing licensing authority.
- The licence-holder must maintain all required records in a form that inspectors can readily view; if stored electronically they must be legible and accessible.
- The organisation must receive a visit by a veterinarian at least once a year, for the purpose of advising the operator on animal welfare.
- The organisation must keep appropriate records, as specified, for a period of five years.

### Animal Numbers

- The total number of animals kept at any time must not exceed the maximum that is reasonable taking into account the facilities and numbers of employed staff and volunteers on the premises.

## **Staffing**

- There must be a sufficient number of competent staff or volunteers. Staff must be able to recognise normal behaviour for the species in their care, and to identify signs of disease, distress, injury or abnormal behaviour.
- Volunteers may only carry out tasks for which they have been trained. A written training policy for all staff and volunteers must be in place.

## **Environment / Establishment**

- An establishment must provide an environment which is suitable for the species kept and their condition, so that they can express their natural behaviours, have access to water, light and ventilation as needed.
- Animals must be kept in housing that minimises stress, including stress from other animals or the public. If members of public can view or contact animals, appropriate signage must discourage disturbance.
- Dangerous wild animals (if held) must be kept in secure, lockable housing suitable to the species.
- Establishments must be kept clean and disinfected to prevent diseases.
- Establishments should have appropriate, self-contained isolation facilities for the care of sick, injured or potentially infectious animals.

## **Suitable Diet**

- Feeding must be appropriate to the species (quality, quantity, frequency), water must be fresh and clean.
- Feed and water containers must be cleanable or disposable; feed preparation (if done on-site) must be hygienic.

## Enrichment / Handling / Protection from suffering, injury and disease

- Active and effective environmental enrichment must be provided to the animals in both inside and outside environments.
- Animals must not be left unattended in conditions that are likely to cause distress.
- Resources (space, food, water, shelter) must be provided so as to minimise competition or dominance.

## Rehoming

- The licence-holder must keep a register covering all animals held at the establishment.
- For animals kept in groups (where individual tracking isn't practicable, e.g. some small mammals), group-level records are acceptable.
- For rehoming animals such as dogs, cats or horses, adverts must include a photo and, where known, the animal's age. The licence number and issuing authority must be recorded.
- When animals are offered for rehoming/supply, the adopter must be provided with information about care, husbandry, and veterinary care; a suitably trained person must be available to provide advice; and the prospective new keeper must be given known details of the animal (age, sex, vet history).

## Wild Animals

- Where a wildlife rescue is to be released, this may only be done if the release area is suitable for the species; and the animal is capable of feeding and surviving independently.

### Question 1

**Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that rehome more than five animals annually should be inspected and licensed?**

**Question 2**

**Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that care for eight or more animals (or five or more dogs) should be inspected and licensed?**

**Question 3**

**Do you agree with the licence conditions as proposed?**

## 2. Dog Licence Fees

Dog licensing was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1983 to enhance public safety and dog control, monitor the dog population and promote responsible dog ownership. Anyone who keeps a dog must have a valid licence from their local council. Councils also enforce the law. It is illegal to keep an unlicensed dog, and you can be fined up to £1,000.

### Current fees

The last change to dog licence fees was in 2011. Fees are: £12.50 for a single dog; £32 for a block licence (for three or more dogs kept at the same place) and £5 for concessionary licences. People who receive income-related benefits, or who have had their dog neutered, may pay a reduced £5 fee. Anyone aged 65 or over may obtain a free licence for their first or only dog. Assistance dogs and police dogs do not need a licence.

### Need for change

Councils now spend more on running the licensing system and providing dog warden services than they collect through licence fees. The current fees are very low compared to the overall cost of owning a dog. Raising the fees will give councils more resources to deliver dog control services, which benefits dog owners and the wider public.

### Proposed new fees

The Department proposes to update the legislation to apply an inflationary increase to dog licence fees.

The proposed fees are:

- £18.50 for a single dog licence
- £47.50 for a block licence

Concessionary licences will remain available, and it is proposed to also apply an inflationary increase to the fee bringing it to £7.50. Licence exemptions for assistance and police dogs will remain, and anyone aged 65 or over will continue to receive a free licence for their first or only dog.

**Question 4**

**Do you agree with the proposed inflationary increase across all categories of dog licence fees as set out above?**

### 3. Aversive training devices

Aversive training devices aim to stop unwanted animal behaviours by associating them with discomfort, pain, or fear. These devices may cause physical or psychological harm and are most often used on dogs and cats.

#### Current situation

The use of aversive training devices is not prohibited in Northern Ireland, but animals wearing these devices are protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This means people can use such devices as long as they do not cause unnecessary suffering to the animal. For instance, setting the device's signal too high could result in unnecessary suffering, which would be a violation of the 2011 Act.

The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs recommends that only positive reward-based training should be used, and potentially painful or frightening training methods such as e-collars should be avoided.

Handheld remote-controlled electronic collars are used as remote training devices for dogs. They operate by delivering an electric stimulus through metal contact points on a collar, activated via a handheld transmitter.



While intended to deter unwanted behaviours by creating an association between the behaviour and the stimulus, these devices raise significant welfare concerns. Some models can deliver shocks of up to 6,000 volts for prolonged periods, which can cause pain and distress

Choke collars operate by tightening a metal chain or linked rings around the neck when pulled, so that the discomfort discourages the dog from pulling over time. The perceived benefits of their use such as immediate correction to behaviour and perception that they offer increased control over large or strong dogs are outweighed by the high risk of tracheal compression, thyroid damage, ocular pressure, and cervical spine injury.



Prong collars, also known as pinch collars, consist of interlinked prongs that apply pressure around a dog's neck when tension is placed on the lead. This design discourages pulling by tightening as the dog pulls, gradually teaching the dog to stop. The pressure is distributed evenly around the neck rather than focused solely on the trachea. These collars can provide rapid suppression of strong pulling and offer increased control, particularly for large or powerful dogs.



There have been calls, both nationally and UK-wide, from groups such as the British Veterinary Association and the Dogs Trust, to prohibit the use of aversive training devices, and in particular electric shock collars, due to animal welfare concerns.

## Proposal

The Department proposes to ban the use of handheld e-collars, choke collars, and prong collars on cats and dogs in Northern Ireland. It is considered that these aversive training devices present the highest risk of deliberate misuse and direct harm to animal welfare.

Electronic containment fence systems and spray collars were considered as part of this proposal. While both rely on aversive stimuli and have raised concerns about welfare

impacts, they are assessed as presenting a lower risk of deliberate misuse and direct harm than handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars.

Therefore, it is proposed that these types of devices would not be banned. Their use would, however, continue to be subject to the general protections afforded under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

**Question 5**

**Do you agree that the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars) on dogs and cats should be banned?**

**Question 6**

**Do you agree that the use of choke collars on dogs and cats should be banned?**

**Question 7**

**Do you agree that the use of prong collars on dogs and cats should be banned?**

## 4. Strengthening Microchipping requirements for dogs

Microchipping was introduced under The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to help identify dogs and their owners more easily, improve traceability, and support enforcement of dog laws. A dog must be microchipped for the licence to be valid. The microchip number is registered on a database along with the owner's contact details and information about the dog, making it easier to reunite lost dogs with their owners and ensure responsible ownership.

### Current requirements

Under current legislation, there are three options for when a dog should be microchipped:

- puppies that remain with their mother should be microchipped by six months old;
- puppies that are kept under a block licence, or under a licence to keep a dog breeding establishment, must be microchipped before eight weeks; and
- dogs must be microchipped before a keeper can receive a dog licence, and before their sale or transfer.

Currently, a veterinary surgeon, or someone who has received instruction on how to implant a microchip, may implant a microchip. The person who conducted the microchipping must notify the database operator of the details within seven days and if the keeper's name, address or telephone number changes, the keeper must notify the operator of the database with the latest information, as soon as reasonably practicable.

At present, databases in Northern Ireland are required to record the microchip number, the keeper's details (name, address and telephone number) and details about the dog (breed, sex, colour, distinguishing marks; and date of birth/estimated year of birth).

### Need for change

The Department has received calls for the strengthening of microchipping requirements for dogs from a wide range of stakeholders and for various reasons; including improving tools

available to enforcement officers, increasing transparency regarding origins of the dogs, shining a light on breeders and breeding practices, and placing more robust requirements on microchip implanters, dog owners, and database providers.

## Proposal

The Department proposes to:

- make it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases, such as a change of address, within a specified time (i.e. 14 days).
- requirement for owners/keepers to declare that they are also the breeder of the dog, to enable database providers to record breeder details where the breeder is also the keeper of the dog; and
- require all owners/keepers to microchip their dogs, by eight weeks of age.

### Question 8

**Do you agree that owners be required to update any changes onto the relevant microchip databases within a specified time, such as 14 days?**

### Question 9

**Do you agree that the owner must indicate if they are / are not the breeder of the dog?**

### Question 10

**Do you agree that all dogs should be microchipped before they are older than eight weeks?**

## 5. Call for Evidence on microchipping of pet cats

The Department is gathering views, evidence, and information on whether microchipping of pet (owned) cats should be considered in Northern Ireland.

This Call for Evidence is intended to gather information to help assess:

- whether mandatory microchipping of cats would improve animal welfare and responsible ownership;
- what benefits such a requirement could deliver;
- what risks, barriers, costs or unintended consequences might arise; and,
- what concerns stakeholders may have, including practical, ethical or enforcement-related issues.

Currently in Northern Ireland, cats are not legally required to be microchipped. Microchipping is already required for dogs, and when a dog is found, the microchip can be read with a scanner and the registered keeper identified. We want to understand whether microchipping could bring any benefits for cat welfare and traceability, and responsible ownership, and the issues or concerns that might need to be considered before any decisions are made.

The Department welcomes evidence from all interested parties and respondents are encouraged to provide evidence, including data, research, case studies, practical experience or any impacts on specific groups. All information provided will be analysed to inform the way forward for any future policy proposals, which when finalised, will be subject to public consultation.

### Question 1

**Do you keep, or own, one or more cats?**

*If yes, go to question 2. If no, go to question 3.*

### Question 2

**Is your cat microchipped?**

*I have one cat, it is microchipped*

*I have one cat, it is not microchipped*

*I have more than one cat, none are microchipped*

*I have more than one cat, some are microchipped*

*I have more than one cat, all are microchipped*

### Question 3

**What benefits, if any, do you think microchipping of pet cats could bring?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

### Question 4

**What challenges, if any, do you think microchipping of pet cats could bring?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

### Question 5

**What do you think might present a barrier for cat owners to microchip their pet cats?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

**Question 6**

**Are there any other challenges that should be considered, in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

**Question 7**

**Are there any other challenges, including for any other type of cats, which should be considered?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

**Question 8**

**Is there anything else you would like DAERA to consider on this issue?**

*Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.*

## Chapter 4: Impact Assessments and Next Steps

### Impact Assessments

#### Equality and Rural Needs Assessments

Equality and Rural Needs assessments have been carried out for each of the proposals within this consultation to consider potential impacts. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of our assessments; responses can be made through Citizen Space or by emailing. Copies of these assessments are available online at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations>.

#### Regulatory Impact Assessment

Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) have been carried out for each of the proposals within the consultation to consider the potential impacts. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of the RIAs; responses can be made through Citizen Space or by emailing [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk). A copy of the assessment is available online at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation>.

**Please note that the impact assessments are collated within one document for each policy proposal.**

### Next Steps

Following analysis of the responses received, the Department will consider and publish a summary of the responses. Subject to the nature of those responses and Ministerial consideration, the Department will then take the steps to introduce the necessary legislation on the proposals within this consultation document. Please note that responses from groups will be considered as one response.

## Chapter 5: How to Respond and When

### Responses

You can respond to this consultation online by accessing the consultation at the following link: [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations).

If you wish to respond in writing, you can request a copy of the written response template by e-mailing [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk).

Written responses should be sent to:

E-mail: [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk)  
Postal address: Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch  
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
Jubilee House  
111 Ballykelly Road  
Ballykelly  
Limavady  
BT49 9HP

When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents, and where applicable, how the views of its members were assembled.

### Closing date

Responses should be submitted by **30 June 2026**.

## Confidentiality

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, the Department in this case. This includes information provided in response to this consultation.

The Department will publish a synopsis of responses to the consultation. This will include a list of names of organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.

The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation to be confidential. However, it does have a responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to a consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response. Please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, except in very particular circumstances. Please note, if your computer automatically includes a confidentiality disclaimer, it will not count as a confidentiality request.

Should you respond in an individual capacity, the Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications (Amendments etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This means that your personal information will not be disclosed to third parties should you request confidentiality.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (see its website at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/>).

## Appendix 1: List of Consultees

This consultation document will be sent to statutory consultees and the following organisations:

- Almost Home Animal Rescue NI
- Animal Connexions
- Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI)
- Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH)
- Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI)
- Assisi Animal Sanctuary
- Belfast Harbour Police
- Belfast International Airport Constabulary
- Benvardin Kennels
- British Veterinary Association Northern Ireland
- Bright eyes animal sanctuary
- Canine Breeders Northern Ireland
- Causeway Coast Dog Rescue
- Cats Protection
- Clara cat Neutering Omagh
- Corran Kennels
- Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary
- Dogs Trust
- Dooletter Wildlife Rescue
- Drumbonaway Kennels
- Foyle Wildlife Rescue
- Friends of Rescue
- Graces Foster Dogs
- Grovehill Animal Trust
- Husky Salvation
- K9 Search & Rescue NI
- Lost Paws NI

- Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary
- Millvale Animal Sanctuary
- Naturewatch Foundation
- NI Exotic Sanctuary
- North Coast Cat Rescue
- Northern Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA)
- Nutt's Corner Boarding Kennels
- Paws and People
- People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)
- Pet FBI Rescue
- Play for Strays
- Rainbow Animal Shelter
- Rainbow Rehoming Centre
- Rosies Trust
- St Columb's Animal Rescue & Rehoming
- The Barn Animal Rescue
- The Doghouse Sanctuary
- The Kennel Club
- The Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)
- Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
- Ulster Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA)
- Vet NI
- 7th Heaven Animal Rescue

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An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
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