Petitioner submission of 21 March 2024

PE2083/B: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

The Scottish Government's submission betrays two fundamental misunderstandings:

1. *"There is… a balance to be struck between protecting animal welfare and protecting public safety."*
2. *"Allowing the owner of an XL Bully dog to exercise their dog in a public place while off lead and without a muzzle… would create too great a risk to the public."*

These unevidenced statements contradict both my experience and the evidence of the academic research presented below. This legislation has had an immediate negative impact on the welfare of XL Bully type dogs, creating a life of chronic stress, which is a recognised cause of **increased aggression** in dogs.

Dogs who experience lower welfare standards experience much higher levels of stress, indicated by higher levels of cortisol, and these dogs also exhibit more behavioural issues (Menor-Campos et al., 2011). Already aggressive dogs have been shown to have higher levels of the stress-related hormone cortisol compared to dogs who were not aggressive. (Rosado et al., 2010).

Wearing a muzzle on a regular basis significantly **increases** levels of cortisol in dogs (Malancus, 2019). Mandatory daily muzzle use negatively impacts social behaviours and decreases both welfare and quality of life in the dogs affected (Arhant et al., 2021). The results of the same study also show that badly fitting muzzles, especially when used daily, represent a significant risk factor for the development of painful injuries to the dog. Pain in dogs is recognised to cause or exacerbate problem behaviours, including aggression (Mills et al., 2024).

Further research reveals that dogs which are restricted to lead exercise ("sedentary dogs") are **more aggressive** than "active" dogs (i.e. those participating in high-energy off-lead training such as agility and other dog sports). "Sedentary" dogs were twice as likely to "react aggressively when touched on the head" and more than twice as likely to exhibit

“aggressive behaviour when scolded” compared to those active dogs who were regularly trained off-leash (Zilocchi et al., 2016).

So, in fact, *there is no “balance to be struck*” – when a dog’s welfare needs, including exercise and training, are fully met, the public are safer. When a dog’s welfare is compromised, by muzzling on every walk and never being allowed to exhibit basic natural behaviours outdoors such as running, then chronic stress results, cortisol levels increase and the dog becomes **more** aggressive, resulting in a much **greater** risk to public safety, particularly indoors.

80% of dog attacks already happen indoors or in private gardens (Loder, 2019). Restricting dogs’ welfare as this legislation does will result in an increase in indoor attacks, and this study shows that **the victims are then more likely to be children or elderly people.**

During the four years we have owned my dog, we have daily trained and exercised him completely safely, on and off the leash, without incident. Until the new law came in, his muzzle was only for vet’s visits. In our care, he has presented no risk at all to the public. Our “safeguarding measures” which achieved this zero-risk approach, included maintaining a safe distance from other people and dogs and training him **every single day** in basic obedience, including recall, “leave” and “stop”. It is no longer possible, within the law, for us to practice these commands outdoors and so we are quickly losing the voice control we once had over our 40kg dog. (Our nearest “secure dog park” is 2+ hours drive away from home.)

Further research validates my dog’s welfare need to be allowed to exercise safely off the leash (Foltin et al., 2021). This study reveals that dogs **need** to be allowed to exercise off leash regularly to be able to exhibit their natural physiological walking pace, which is faster than any human’s. The study concludes that “*most dogs stay close to their owner and off leash restrictions should be reconsidered*.”

We have tried our best to comply with the new law, but my previously well-adjusted, well-trained, completely safe dog is now showing classic signs of the chronic stress which leads to aggression. He has lost 5kg due to stress since we started using the muzzle regularly. We are now breaking the 2006 Animal Welfare Act to comply with the 2024 legislation and **my dog is becoming more dangerous as a result** – this is not a sustainable situation.

"*Overall, it becomes more challenging for dog owners to provide their dog with opportunities for 'a good life' or 'a life worth living' if mandatory muzzling is enacted*." (Arhant et al., 2021)

"*For animals to have "lives worth living" it is necessary, overall, to minimise their negative experiences and at the same time to provide the animals with opportunities to have positive experiences*." (Mellor, 2016)

I'm calling on the Government to annul this SSI and repeal this legislation as soon as possible **in order to <u>restore</u> public safety** in my home and many others.

Thank you.

<u>References</u>

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