



*****Under strict embargo until 01:00AM on Thursday, September 28*****

Dog-trafficking in London: New report exposes loophole allowing thousands of poorly-bred puppies to be imported from Europe

- Traffickers mass-importing sick young dogs for commercial sale
- One seller linked to 834 dog ads over 24-month period with potential income of £1.3million
- Most dogs trafficked from central and eastern Europe
- Vets in Lithuania and Hungary admit falsifying information on pet passports
- Puppies often bred in unhygienic conditions and carry hidden diseases
- Owners tricked into buying sick dogs that later have to be put down

Thousands of sick and poorly-bred puppies are being imported into London from Europe by dog traffickers exploiting a loophole in the law, a new report has found.

‘Sick Puppy’, by London Assembly member Steve O’Connell, exposes the shocking extent of the lucrative hidden trade operating in the capital.

The report found evidence of puppies being imported en-masse from central and eastern Europe and being sold online to unsuspecting customers.

Most puppies have been taken from their mothers too soon, are bred in unhygienic conditions and often carry diseases that only manifest themselves once they have been sold.

The report found sellers are exploiting a loophole in the Pets Travel Scheme (PETS), which enables dog, cat or ferret owners to travel within the EU with their pet without the need for quarantine on arrival.

To qualify, the animals need to be microchipped, hold a pet passport, be vaccinated against rabies and any dogs entering the UK must have received tapeworm treatment directly prior to travel.

However, Mr O’Connell’s report found border checks are rare and traffickers are exploiting rules allowing up to five puppies to be imported per person – enabling potentially dozens of illegal animals to be carried over in a single vehicle.

The lucrative industry could be worth millions of pounds a year, with evidence that one seller was using 133 email accounts linked to 834 dog adverts over a two-year period.

Popular breeds include Pugs and French Bulldogs, with sellers bringing the animals over as young as possible to take advantage of the 'cute factor' of puppies aged between six and 16 weeks.

Despite the apparent prevalence of the practice, prosecutions are rare, with the City of London Corporation confiscating just 46 puppies from 31 cases reported between 2012 and 2016.

Of those, 12 puppies came from Lithuania, four each came from Poland and Hungary and three originated from Romania.

Mr O'Connell's report makes several recommendations for targeting the industry and making it less appealing for those exploiting the loophole.

Report author, London Assembly member Steve O'Connell said: "The apparent prevalence of this sickening and immoral trade in a modern city like London is truly shocking.

"Dog trafficking is an appalling industry that encourages the cruel mistreatment of thousands of animals every year and it cannot be allowed to continue freely operating in our capital.

"It is not just animals that are harmed. Unsuspecting families and individuals unknowingly purchase these dogs, only to find they are hit with huge veterinary bills or, even worse, the heart-breaking decision to put these poorly-bred animals down.

"Changes are needed to cut the profits from this operation and make the exploitation of the PETS scheme far less lucrative and appealing to those who would flout the rules.

"I am calling on the Mayor to use his influence to bring about the changes that are needed to stop the importation of sick puppies into our city."

ENDS.

Notes

A copy of the full report can be found at <http://glaconservatives.co.uk/spu>

Report recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION #1 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that the PETS Scheme be amended to permit only 5 animals per vehicle rather than 5 per person up to the current limit of 3 persons with possible waivers for bona fide breeders travelling to established dog shows. This would limit the financial incentives to trafficking.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that that no dog or cat under the age of 6 months be permitted to enter the country under PETS. This would be a disincentive to breeders as it would mean they would have to feed and

support an animal for a much longer period cutting any profit. Also at 6 months an animal is past the “cuddly” stage and therefore not as easy to sell.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - That the Mayor of London recommends to the government that rabies testing and tick treatments be reintroduced with a wait period of at least 30 days after the date of vaccination and for there then to be a 3 month wait period before the pet animal is moved between countries. In addition to the disease limitation factor this would also be a financial disincentive.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact the press office below.

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