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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government

## Consultation Document

# Compulsory Microchipping of Dogs

Date of issue: **16 May 2012**  
Responses by **8 August 2012**

## Overview

The Welsh Government is considering introducing legislation that would require all dogs in Wales to be microchipped, and for the information relating to the microchip and ownership of the animal to be recorded on an approved database.

Microchipping is a physically robust method of identification. The process should only need to be done once in the lifetime of a dog.

The legislation would be made under Section 12 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and enforcement of the legislation would be the responsibility of Local Authorities.

The Welsh Ministers are proposing all puppies and dogs kept by licensed breeders are microchipped, and are considering the benefits of microchipping in relation to any new legislation for the control of dogs.

The key benefit of compulsory microchipping of all dogs is improved animal welfare. It should encourage owners to take greater responsibility for their dogs' welfare and behaviour, including fouling. It could also provide traceability for disease control purposes.

This consultation provides stakeholders and members of the public the opportunity to comment on the principles that could be drafted into legislation.

## How to respond

You can respond to this consultation by either using the questionnaire at the back of this document or writing separately to:

**Email:** [companionanimalwelfare@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:companionanimalwelfare@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

**Mail:** Animal Welfare and By-Products Branch  
Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

## Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.

For further information about the Welsh Government's ongoing animal welfare work, please see [www.wales.gov.uk/animalwelfare](http://www.wales.gov.uk/animalwelfare)

## Contact Details

For further information:

Animal Welfare & By-Products Branch  
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**Telephone:** 02920 823477

## Data Protection

**How the views and information you give us will be used.**

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

## **Where are we now?**

The Welsh Government's recent pilot household survey of 4,000 households in 2010 estimated there were some 463,000 dogs in Wales. In addition, the Pet Food Manufacturers Association's 2012 Annual Report estimates that, as of 2011, there were approximately 8m dogs in the UK. They also calculate that 30% of households have at least one dog. Given that there are about 1.2m households in Wales, this correlates with the Welsh Government findings on the number of animals in Wales.

The records of dogs that have been microchipped are held on commercially owned databases. There are three main database holders in the UK, who make up the majority of the market. They are Petlog, Avid and Anibase. All of these databases are commercial, privately owned organisations; whilst their core requirements are the same, they are not identical. For example, Avid allows a secondary contact to be named, to allow for periods when a dog may be in boarding kennels or being kept temporarily away from its owner.

Figures obtained from the operators of commercial registration databases show that a significant proportion of dog owners have voluntarily had their animals' microchipped. We will seek to work in tandem with other UK administrations to provide consistent rules.

The practice of microchipping is already a legal requirement in Northern Ireland under The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. It is also a requirement of the Pet Travel Scheme, exempted dogs under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, and for dogs that have had their tails docked (Docking of Working Dogs' Tails (Wales) Regulations 2007).

## **The Welsh Position**

In October 2009, the Welsh Government carried out 2 surveys on microchipping: one to Local Authorities, the other to Veterinary Surgeries. Seven of the twelve Local Authorities that responded took the view that microchipping of dogs should be made compulsory, whilst 65% of the 83 vets that responded felt that microchipping should not remain voluntary.

In March 2010, Welsh Government officials organised a workshop with key stakeholders to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of microchipping. Whilst concerns such as the requirement to update records and migration of the microchip were raised, overall there was enormous support for microchipping as an identification tool which would help in preventing an animal's welfare from being compromised.

In 2011, Welsh Government officials held a series of small, informal meetings with key stakeholders that included database holders, welfare organisations and enforcement officers. The purpose of these meetings was to determine the then current position with microchipping, and to identify any issues that needed to be considered in taking forward this proposal. It was clear from all meetings that there is a high level of support for the introduction of compulsory microchipping in Wales.

The Welsh Government is currently consulting on proposals to amend Dog Breeding legislation. Under the new proposals, contained in the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2012, licensed dog breeders will be required to microchip their puppies before sale and to register the transfer on an authorised database. They will also be required to microchip all dogs kept on their premises.

## **Evidence for Change**

### **What are the main issues?**

Under the Control of Dogs Order 1992, it is a legal requirement for a dog normally to be identifiable by wearing a collar and tag, with the owner's name and address on it. However, due to the ease of which a collar or tag can be removed, lost or changed, this legislation is not sufficiently robust. Tattooing is also a popular method of identification, particularly with working dogs. However, these can fade over time and, in abandonment cases, it has been known for dogs to be mutilated to remove any evidence of such tattoos. Microchipping would provide permanent identification that is difficult to remove.

The Dogs Trust Stray Dog Survey 2011

(<http://www.dogstrust.org.uk/az/s/straydogsurvey/default.aspx>) suggested that, UK-wide, the number of stray dogs is increasing. In 2011, it was estimated that 9,482 stray dogs were handled in Wales; it seems that current identification legislation is not working.

Compulsory microchipping could:

- Improve animal welfare by making it easier to reunite a stray dog with its owner. The period of confinement for microchipped stray dogs may be reduced, therefore reducing the level of stress for the dog when separated from its owner.
- Develop further, responsible ownership by introducing greater traceability of owners (past and current).
- Help establish liability and prove ownership.
- Will assist control measures in case of any diseases that can be transferred to humans.
- Act as a deterrent against dog theft – the microchip relates the dog to its owner and therefore it can be determined if the dog is stolen.

## **Proposal**

The Welsh Government is proposing that all dogs in Wales are to be microchipped. However, in making that proposal, there are a number of options which could be taken.

## Options

### **Option 1: Not introduce legislation but continue to work with local authorities and third sector organisations to encourage owners to microchip their dogs on a voluntary basis**

In Wales, we have already benefitted from the different companion animal welfare organisations working closely together. The establishment of the Animal Welfare Network Wales, the Companion Animal Welfare Enhancement Scheme (CAWES) and its successor the Cross-Sector Companion Animal Welfare (C-SCAW) Forum has helped to foster a strong working link between many organisations.

The Kennel Club together with Dogs Trust and other welfare organisations have provided significant financial support to initiatives aiming to increase the voluntary uptake of microchipping over the years. These initiatives include funding microchips for lower income owners, regional microchip installation, and advertising campaigns. Veterinarians also encourage microchipping.

The Dogs Trust, in common with other re-homing/rescue organisations microchip every dog that arrives at their 17 re-homing centres in the UK that is not already microchipped. All their centres offer £10 dog microchipping to any owner or free microchipping for owners on means tested benefits. The Dogs Trust have given out over 82,000 free microchips to Councils and Housing Associations across the UK since Jan 2011 to allow them to promote free microchipping in their communities.

Currently and of course subject to consultation, it is not thought that financial constraints will prevent owners microchipping. Furthermore, as noted above, welfare organisations provide a subsidised microchipping service to those on income support. Welfare organisations already strongly promote microchipping and a majority of vets offer a microchipping service. Improving availability and/or information is therefore unlikely to significantly increase voluntary uptake.

Given the efforts made already to encourage owners to microchip their dogs, it is firmly believed that the only way to achieve a significant increase in the take-up of microchipping is for government intervention through the introduction of compulsory microchipping.

### **Option 2: Microchip puppies only**

This option would require all puppies born after legislation was made to be microchipped but not older dogs. We are currently working on dog breeding legislation where all licensed breeders will need to microchip their animals before selling them on from their premises. Therefore, this proposal would extend that proposal to require, anybody breeding dogs (whether licensed or not) to microchip their puppies before they are moved on.

Over 10 – 12 years this option would ensure all dogs were microchipped. However, in the lengthy intervening period, enforcement by Local Authorities will be difficult and we would not see the benefit of tracing stray and abandoned dogs to their owners.

The introduction of such a scheme would eventually lead to all dogs being microchipped. This is because as dogs die they will be replaced by new dogs which will need to be microchipped. However, this could prove problematic for enforcers to identify a dog's age, and, as stated above, it will take over a decade for the intention of the legislation to be realised.

### **Option 3: Microchip new puppies and older dogs on transfer of ownership**

Puppies born after the legislation came into force would be microchipped. Older dogs would be chipped if they were sold or gifted to a new home. It would be an offence not to comply and/or to fail to keep the registered details up to date. This option would not impose a requirement on owners of older dogs who have the freedom of choice whether or not to have their dogs microchipped if they are keeping their current dog. Anyone breeding a dog and keeping it for themselves would also need to microchip and register that dog. This would avoid owners falsely claiming that they have not microchipped their dog because they have bred and kept it. This option over time (10-12 years) would ensure all dogs in the population were microchipped.

This option will be difficult to enforce. Until all the dog population has been microchipped there will always be a pool of unidentifiable dogs and it will be difficult to tell exactly whether a dog is of an age where it should have been microchipped as a puppy. The gradual approach would do little in the short to medium term in resolving the numbers of stray and abandoned dogs that cannot be traced to their owners and thereby easing the burden on Local Authorities and dog re-homing centres.

### **Option 4: Microchipping new puppies and upon transfer of ownership at first, moving to microchipping all dogs within one year of the legislation coming into force**

Puppies born after the legislation came into force would be microchipped. Older dogs would be chipped if they were sold or gifted to a new home. Thereafter all dogs should be microchipped within a year of legislation coming into effect. This would give a clear enforcement date after which all dogs must be microchipped. It would also help relieve the pressures on Local Authorities and re-homing centres in the short to medium term and help reduce the numbers of strays and dogs that need to be re-homed. All owners would have a much greater chance of getting back their dogs if lost. This option does not give existing owners of dogs the freedom not to microchip their dogs.

It might put pressure on microchip databases in registering a large number of dogs in a short time, involve extra staff costs and lead to delays in processing registrations. However, database representatives have said that they are confident that they could deal with the large volume of applications this approach would generate.

**Option 5: Microchipping new puppies upon transfer of ownership at first, moving to microchipping all dogs at a future date**

Puppies born after the legislation came into force would be microchipped. Older dogs would be chipped if they were sold or gifted to a new home. Compulsory microchipping of all dogs would be delayed until some point in the future. This would help relieve the potential burdens on microchipping database operators and possible processing costs and delays but would prolong the enforcement uncertainty. It would also delay resolving the numbers of stray and abandoned dogs that cannot be traced to their owners and delay easing the burden on Local Authorities and dog re-homing centres.

# Consultation Response Form

Your name:

Organisation (if applicable):

Email/telephone number:

Your address:

## Questions

1. Do you think that all dogs in Wales should have to be microchipped?

Why?

2. If compulsory microchipping was introduced in Wales, should the legislation require:

- only puppies born after the legislation is made be microchipped?
- all dogs be microchipped within 1 year of the legislation being made?
- microchipping only be required for new puppies and upon change of ownership?
- microchipping be required for new puppies and all dogs on change of ownership and the remainder microchipped within an agreed timescale, for example five years?
- there be a phased approach, by microchipping puppies at time of sale?

Please comment.

3. When a microchipped animal changes ownership, the registration details on the database would need to be updated. With whom should this responsibility lie: the seller, the buyer, or both?

4. We propose to require microchip registration details to be stored on approved commercial databases – do you agree?

5. The compulsory microchipping of dogs would require owners to pay to microchip their pet. What are your thoughts on this issue?

6. We have set out what we think are the benefits to microchipping your animal. We would like to know your views on compulsory microchipping.

7. At present, the owner of the animal, the microchip implanter and some animal welfare organisations are able to access current records, but only enforcement authorities are able to see previous records. Do you think this should remain the same? If not, please explain.



8. Should there be any exemptions from compulsory microchipping?

9 We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Please enter here:

Responses to consultations may be made public – on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be kept confidential, please tick here: