



Animal Sentience Committee: assessment of the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill

17 July 2025

The Animal Sentience Committee (ASC) is a statutory committee established by the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 in May 2023. The ASC has a remit to assess whether, or to what extent, the government has given all due regard to the ways in which a policy might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals, as sentient beings.

This report summarises our findings following assessment of the associated policy, and – where relevant – contains recommendations in relation to any further formulation or implementation of the policy.

The policy

The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill.

Grounds for ASC engagement

The ASC welcomes the bill, which proposes several key changes to existing legislation that will benefit animal welfare.

Relevant to this assessment, the bill:

- broadens the definition of livestock worrying to include both attacking and worrying
- extends the areas covered to include roads and paths, addressing incidents occurring during livestock movement
- expands the definition of livestock to include camelids, such as alpacas and llamas
- grants police enhanced powers, including the ability to seize and detain dogs involved in incidents, enter premises to gather evidence, and collect samples from both livestock and dogs to aid investigations

While the bill clearly enhances the welfare of livestock by increased protection measures, there are also welfare implications of these amendments for dogs alleged to be involved in the offence. Dogs acting under instinct or under the command of a person cannot be considered responsible for their actions. While the risk they pose to the welfare of livestock must be prioritised, any measures necessary should minimise compromise to their welfare.

Evidence provided

The ASC considered the bill and the associated explanatory notes. Following this assessment, they posed questions to the bill's policy team, who provided prompt and helpful responses to these queries.

Areas of focus

The ASC identified one key area with a potential negative impact on the welfare of dogs. This related to seizure and detention of dogs if a constable considers there to be reasonable grounds to believe the dog has attacked or worried livestock.

Under the bill, dogs may be detained until the initial investigation is complete and subsequently until the court case can be heard, if the dog is considered to represent an ongoing risk to livestock. Removal of a dog from its normal environment is stressful for the animal. While the ASC acknowledges that licensed kennels must meet the basic welfare needs of detained dogs, this does not necessarily eliminate associated distress.

The bill sets no limits on the maximum length of time a dog may be detained, and if courts are congested this may be many months. For irresponsible dog owners, there is a risk that repeated offences may see animals repeatedly detained for prolonged periods throughout their lives.

There is provision within the existing act (and bill) for disposal (rehoming or euthanasia) of dogs seized and detained by the police where an owner is not present (or does not identify themselves), and where costs associated with detention are not paid within seven days following seizure. However, there is no provision within the bill for disposal of dogs as an alternative to, or in addition to, fines for those convicted of the offence. In a small number of cases, for example repeat offenders, this may offer long-term welfare benefits for the dog.

Recommendations

The ASC recommends that the policy team liaises with suitable experts and organisations in canine welfare over whether a maximum term of detention could be set for dogs considered to be at ongoing risk of livestock worrying. Any recommendations should be reflected in guidance notes.

The policy team could consider the option of disposal of the dog as an alternative to, or in addition to, a fine for those convicted of offences in this bill. Disposal as a penalty could potentially eliminate the need to use alternative legislation (such as the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991) in cases where rehoming or destruction may better serve both the dog's welfare and societal interests.

Conclusions

From the evidence provided by the policy team, the ASC are currently satisfied that adequate due regard has been given for the welfare of sentient animals in this policy.