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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 11 September to the Home Secretary on behalf of your constituents about American Bully XL dogs. Your email has been passed to Defra and I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

We recognise that dog attacks can have horrific consequences, and we take this issue very seriously.

The Government is taking urgent action to bring forward a ban on XL Bully dog types following a concerning rise in attacks and fatalities, which appear to be driven by this type of dog. We firmly believe that the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 plays a very important part in our overall approach towards tackling dangerous dogs.

Our first step will be to define the 'American XL Bully' breed type. The Environment Secretary has convened experts to define the 'American XL Bully' breed type. This group includes police, canine and veterinary experts, and animal welfare stakeholders. This is a vital first step towards adding XL Bullies to the list of dogs banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act. This ban will cover England and Wales. We will engage with the relevant devolved administrations about adopting a UK-wide approach.

The Government will then legislate to add XL Bullies to the list of dogs banned under the Act. We intend to have the legislation in place to deliver this ban by the end of the year. This will make it an offence to own an unregistered American XL Bully, or to breed, gift or sell one. There will be a transition period and any further details on how this period will work will be provided ahead of the tabling of the legislation later this year. Dog owners do not need to take any action at this stage.

In the meantime, we are also focussing our efforts on ensuring that the full range of existing powers to tackle dog control issues are effectively applied across all breeds of dog.

We have been working hard with the police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to help prevent attacks by encouraging responsible dog ownership, to ensure dog control issues are addressed before they escalate and to make sure the full force of the law is applied.

Owners whose dogs are dangerously out of control are already breaking the law, and we already have a full range of powers to apply penalties to them. Under the Dangerous Dogs Act, any dog that is dangerously out of control can be euthanised and their owners put in prison for up to 14 years and be banned from ever owning a dog.

As part of this work, we are also considering the role of education and training (for both dogs and their owners) in reducing the risk of dog attacks, as well as considering how we can improve data collection and recording and enforcement practices.

Conclusions from this work are expected soon. These should address all aspects of tackling irresponsible dog ownership effectively, from prevention to robust, consistent enforcement, focussing on owners as well as on their dogs.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Benyon.*

**THE RT HON LORD BENYON**