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Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 8 September 2022 to the Rt Hon Ranil Jayawardena MP on behalf of your constituents about the imports of cats and kittens. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

The Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare is a wide-reaching and ambitious plan to set out our current and future work on animal welfare. The Government has a manifesto commitment to crack down on puppy smuggling, and one of our key reforms in the plan is to end this abhorrent, cruel practice and low-welfare pet imports.

In Autumn 2021, we consulted on further proposed changes to the rules governing the commercial and non-commercial movement of cats, dogs, and ferrets into GB. This included proposals to ban the import of puppies under the age of six months, dogs with cropped ears or docked tails, and dogs that are heavily pregnant.

The consultation did not propose changing the existing requirements for cats or ferrets, as there is limited evidence of a significant illegal or low welfare trade in these species.

We appreciate the concern that people have, as a nation of animal lovers, for any pet that could be threatened by this appalling trade. In relation to the total number of cats being imported, the estimate of 70,000 cats, as detailed in the 'Cats and Their Stats' report, appears to be based on an estimate of the number of cats obtained between March 2020 and March 2021 and the proportion of individuals that reported in a survey that they had sourced a pet from abroad during the same period.

The official Government statistics show that, between March 2020 and March 2021, 27,601 cats entered the UK under the non-commercial rules and 8,511 cats entered under the commercial rules. The official statistics are based on data submitted by pet checkers and carriers for non-commercial movements.

Data for commercial movements in 2020 is taken from the Trade Control and Expert System, and data for commercial movements in 2021 is taken from the Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System. We are engaging with Cats Protection to understand the difference between the reported figures.

We are currently analysing the responses to the consultation and will publish a summary in due course. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders prior to the introduction of the legislation to ensure that our final measures are well-considered and led by the latest evidence.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Benyon.*

**THE RT HON LORD BENYON**