



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Lord Douglas-Miller
Minister for Biosecurity, Animal Health and Welfare

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
Kate.brady@parliament.uk

Our ref: MC2023/18606/EP

13 February 2023

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 21 September to the former Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about XL Bully dogs. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

We recognise that some people are opposed to the Government's decision to add the XL Bully to the list of breed types prohibited under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. However, the Government must balance the views of those who want to repeal or amend breed specific legislation with our responsibility to ensure that the public is properly protected from dog attacks.

We have seen an increase in dog attacks in recent years, including those causing injuries and fatalities, with the XL Bully being disproportionately involved in this rise. That is why we have taken decisive action to add XL Bully breed types to the list of breeds prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. We firmly believe that this approach is needed to reduce the risks to the public by this breed type.

The Government acted quickly to develop a definition for the XL Bully so the breed type could be banned in law. We convened a group of experts and other stakeholders to define the physical characteristics of the breed type. This included representatives from the police, local authorities, devolved administrations and animal welfare experts. This definition and guidance can be found in the Government's [guidance](#).

Since 31 December 2023, all owners of XL Bully breed types must comply with strict conditions. This includes ensuring they put their dog on a lead and muzzle in public. Breeding, selling, exchanging, gifting, abandoning, or allowing these dogs to stray is now banned. It will be a criminal offense to fail to comply with these conditions.

Since 1 February 2024 it has become a criminal offence to be in possession of an XL Bully in England and Wales unless the dog is covered by a Certificate of Exemption. Owners who have a certificate of exemption need to adhere to strict rules for the life of a dog, including holding valid third-party public liability insurance, and for the dog to be microchipped and neutered.

Dogs that were younger than one year old on 31 January 2024, need to be neutered by 31 December 2024. Dogs that were older than one year old on 31 January 2024, must be neutered by 30 June 2024. Owners must use the confirmation of neutering form to tell Defra that the dog has been neutered by these dates respectively. We recommend that owners arrange for their dogs to be neutered as soon as possible to meet these deadlines. Further guidance on neutering is available on GOV.UK.

Owners of XL Bully dogs who chose to have their dog euthanised by a registered vet by 31 January 2024 can [claim £200 towards the cost](#). Owners must apply for compensation by 15 March 2024. If an XL Bully owner brings their dog to be euthanised after 31 January 2024, they will not be able to claim compensation.

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

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.

Owners of other breeds not specifically banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act whose dogs are dangerously out of control are also breaking the law, and we 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.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,



LORD DOUGLAS-MILLER