



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill
Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK.

Tel: +44(0)1582 831818

Website: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk> Email: ufaw@ufaw.org.uk

PRESS RELEASE

Issued: 4/11/2025

New study finds inadequate regulation of the UK puppy trade harms animal welfare, public health, and the environment

A [new study published in *Animal Welfare*](#), the journal of the [Universities Federation for Animal Welfare](#) (UFAW), highlights how weak and poorly enforced regulation of the UK puppy trade has created systemic risks for animal welfare, public health, and the environment, while also enabling links to organised crime. The review offers the most comprehensive overview to date of the trade's scale and impact, concluding that existing legislation has failed to keep pace with the rapid growth of online puppy sales and that enforcement remains severely under-resourced.

The study, "*The canine welfare, public health and environmental impact of systemic under-regulation within the UK puppy trade: A scoping review*", draws on a decade of evidence showing that the largely online puppy trade has outstripped the scope of current laws. It finds that legislative gaps, weak enforcement, and minimal penalties have fostered a high-volume, profit-driven market with severe consequences for animal welfare, public health, and the environment.

Despite measures such as Lucy's Law and the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations, the authors note that enforcement remains fragmented and inconsistent. Only 15-20% of dogs entering UK households each year come from licensed breeders, leaving most traded through unregulated or poorly monitored channels.

The paper identifies major welfare and enforcement concerns, including:

- unethical breeding practices causing chronic health and behavioural problems in dogs
- online anonymity allowing fraudulent and illegal sellers to evade detection
- criminal involvement linked to smuggling, tax evasion, and organised crime networks
- public health risks from unvaccinated imported puppies and the potential for transmission of diseases such as rabies and Leishmania
- environmental harm from waste pollution and overpopulation of dogs in urban areas
- antibiotic resistance and zoonotic threats linked to poor biosecurity and misuse of veterinary drugs

The study calls for urgent legislative reform to strengthen traceability and accountability throughout the puppy supply chain. It recommends establishing a centralised licensing and enforcement system, introducing stronger traceability requirements for all dogs, similar to those used for livestock, and a tightening of regulations of online pet sales platforms. Coordinated public awareness campaigns are also needed to discourage impulsive or unethical purchases and promote responsible sourcing. Without



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill
Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK.
Tel: +44(0)1582 831818

Website: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk> Email: ufaw@ufaw.org.uk

significant reform, the authors warn, current laws will continue to fail in protecting dogs, consumers, and the wider public, while allowing unethical and criminal practices to persist.

Lead author, Katharine Ross, said:

“The puppy trade in the UK is inflicting severe and legacy harm on canine welfare, and many animal welfare researchers, advocates, non-profit organisations, and policymakers are working tirelessly to assess and mitigate this. These issues reflect challenges seen in various novel online marketplaces, where current legislation, effective two decades ago, now struggles to keep pace with the rapid evolution of digital commerce and the effects of an equally under-regulated social media landscape that heavily influences consumer culture and behaviour.

From a One Health perspective, the consequences of poor online regulation are complex and widespread, demonstrating the urgent need for a multi-agency, interdisciplinary response.”

Commenting on the paper, Joint Editor-in-Chief of *Animal Welfare*, Dr Birte Nielsen, said:

“Appropriate sourcing of pets is always important, and this paper investigates the illegal sale of dogs bred in conditions that are severely detrimental to their health and welfare, as well as posing a risk to the public. Although focused on the United Kingdom, the study highlights a number of risks associated with the increase in online puppy sales that are relevant also in other jurisdictions.”

[The full paper is available open access in *Animal Welfare* here.](#)

ENDS

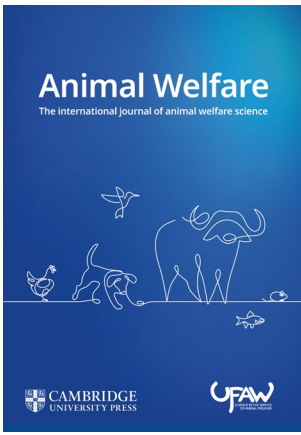
Notes to Editors:

Image: The canine welfare, public health and environmental impact of systemic under-regulation within the UK puppy trade: A scoping review.jpg

Paper: Ross KE, McMillan KM, Bowell V, Clements DN, Mazeri S. The canine welfare, public health and environmental impact of systemic under-regulation within the UK puppy trade: A scoping review. *Animal Welfare*. 2025;34:e72. doi:10.1017/awf.2025.10046

About the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare:

The [Universities Federation for Animal Welfare \(UFAW\)](#) is an international, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity and membership organisation. UFAW’s vision is a world where the welfare of all animals affected by humans is maximised through a scientific understanding of their needs and how to meet them. UFAW promotes an evidence-based approach to animal welfare by funding scientific research, supporting the careers of animal welfare scientists and by disseminating animal welfare



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill
Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK.
Tel: +44(0)1582 831818

Website: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk> Email: ufaw@ufaw.org.uk

science knowledge both to experts and the wider public.

UFAW's work relies on the support of members, subscribers, and donors. To learn more about our work, to become a member of UFAW, or to donate, please visit www.ufaw.org.uk/

About the UFAW Journal - *Animal Welfare*:

[*Animal Welfare*](#) is an international scientific journal. It publishes the results of peer-reviewed scientific research, technical studies, surveys and reviews relating to the welfare of kept animals (eg on farms, in laboratories, zoos and as companions) and of those in the wild whose welfare is compromised by human activities. Papers on related ethical and legal issues are also considered for publication. The journal also includes letters to the editor, opinion papers, horizon topics and commentary on topical issues such as developments in legislation and codes of practice relating to animal welfare, as well as book reviews.

Animal Welfare is published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of UFAW.

Media Contact: Carly Halliday (media@ufaw.org.uk)