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and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

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Our Ref: COR-0210-2025  
Date: 31 March 2025

Dear Barry

## **NOTICE OF MOTION RE: DANGEROUS DOGS LEGISLATION**

Thank-you for your letter, of 18 March 2025, in relation to the motion titled '**Dogs in kennels – Transfer of Ownership**' which was considered at the meeting of Belfast City Council on 3 March 2025. You have indicated the resolution was subsequently passed and within which it seeks my assessment of the impact of the restrictions on rehoming as set out in 'The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order 2024'.

Firstly, I wish to reiterate the reasons for my taking the decision to introduce this legislation.

Whilst I acknowledge that all dogs can be dangerous, the reality remains that if a large and powerful dog, such as an XL Bully, becomes aggressive the consequences are much more likely to be serious and, in the worst cases, fatal. There has been a concerning rise in the number of fatal attacks by dogs in recent years and XL Bully dogs have been found to be disproportionately involved.

In response to this, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs swiftly introduced restrictions on the breed for England, and Wales, followed closely by the Scottish Government. The Republic of Ireland has also now introduced similar measures. In deciding to progress this legislation it was imperative that I balanced public protection, interests of dog owners and ultimately made a decision which I felt was proportionate and based on the best possible evidence.

Additionally, I did not want Northern Ireland to become a breeding hotspot for these dogs, nor a dumping ground. Unfortunately, there is no perfect solution, but I remain of the view

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that the legislation provides councils with the tools and remedies to effectively deal with restricted breeds.

Turning to the impact of restrictions on rehoming, I do appreciate the concerns that have been raised. However, prohibiting the transfer of ownership is a key way in which the legislation seeks to reduce the risk of an attack, thereby seeking to address of the overriding concerns in relation to public safety.

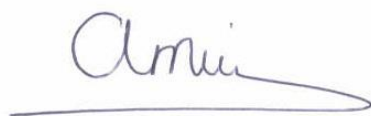
The legal requirement for a restricted dog type to remain with its owner, as provided for by way of the Exemption Certificate, ensures that councils have knowledge of the location of these dogs and can hold owners accountable should any conditions of their exemption be breached. As you are aware, following the closure of the exemption scheme for XL Bully dogs, the only method to retain ownership of a restricted breed is to petition the courts for a 'contingent destruction order.' The court must be convinced that the dog will not pose a threat to the public, provided it is managed under specific strict conditions ('the exemption conditions'). An owner who has received a 'contingent destruction order' has two months to demonstrate that the exemption conditions have been met.

The fact that only a court can make this decision, highlights the serious risk transferring ownership of these dogs may pose. Additionally, in many instances, it is unlikely the history of the dog would be known and past traumas due to irresponsible owners may not be obvious. I am therefore satisfied that this provision is necessary and proportionate.

I acknowledge that responsible dog ownership is essential for ensuring the welfare of dogs. Although the vast majority of dog owners act responsibly, unfortunately, many of the issues which arise are due to the actions of irresponsible owners. Therefore, it is my intention to launch a responsible dog ownership public awareness campaign, and my officials continue to work closely with Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) on this and other related dog control matters.

I trust this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Muir', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**ANDREW MUIR MLA**  
**Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**