



8 April 2019

## BVA RESPONSE TO PETITIONS COMMITTEE FIREWORKS INQUIRY

### INTRODUCTION

- 1) We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We recognise that current legislation provides control on the use and sale of fireworks, as well as provisions to minimise noise levels and protect animal welfare.
- 2) However, loud and high-pitched fireworks can have a negative impact on animal health and welfare by causing stress or fear responses across a range of species, including companion animals, wildlife, horses, livestock and zoo animals.
- 3) We therefore consider that current controls on the use and sale of fireworks, as well as controls to mitigate noise levels, do not go far enough to adequately safeguard the health and welfare of animals in the UK.

**Does the law provide an appropriate balance between allowing for the safe enjoyment by the public and minimising the risk of fireworks harming people, property or animals?**

- 4) Negative impact of noise on animal health and welfare  
Studies, reports and animal welfare organisations all agree that loud and high-pitched fireworks can have a negative impact on animal health and welfare by causing not just physical harm, but stress or fear responses across a range of species, including companion animals, wildlife, horses, livestock and zoo animals.<sup>i,ii,iii,iv, v, vi, vii, viii, ix, x, xi xix,xx,xxiv,xxv</sup>
- 5) As animals have more acute hearing than humans, many show stress, fear or even phobia

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responses to loud and high-pitched noises. [British Small Animal Veterinary Association \(BSAVA\)](#) highlights that these fear responses may be transient and decrease as the animal gets u

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<sup>1</sup> Christensen, J.W.; Rundgren, M.; Olsson, K. Training methods for horses: Habituation to a frightening stimulus. *Equine Vet. J.* 2006, 38, 439–443.

<sup>2</sup> McGreevy, P.D.; McLean, A.N. Punishment in horse-training and the concept of ethical equitation. *J. Vet. Behav. Clin. Appl. Res.* 2009, 4, 193–197.



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10. This recommendation is set out in the RSPCA report *Keep the Noise Down: Loud fireworks frighten animals* (2005). The extract taken from the report below sets out the rationale behind the recommendation:

Most animals, especially pets, are used to and can tolerate common household noises. 97dBAI corresponds to the maximum measured household noise level.

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paragraph 27 is likely required underpinned with insights from population behaviourists.

- 16 Further, we note that current regulations specify that it is illegal to set off fireworks in the street or other public places. We would support that this is clarified to indicate that fireworks should not be set off within a certain distance of livestock or wildlife-rich areas.
- 17 In addition, we would support that all public displays and organised events using fireworks require licensing by the relevant authority.

Please see the following section on related management approaches that mitigate the risks to the safety of pets and people posed by fireworks whilst maintaining responsible use and enjoyment.

### **How effectively are the existing laws enforced by local authorities, trading standards, the police and other authorities?**

- 18 Despite the legislative provisions in place to control and act as a deterrent to noise nuisances, we are concerned that Environmental Health Officers will not be able to adequately enforce powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 given that the transient nature of fireworks makes it extremely difficult to ascertain the source of the noise nuisance.
- 19 To potentially address this we would suggest consideration is given to a simple on-line registration system which automatically generates a 'certificate' for use by the registrant at the point of purchase. In effect, except for Category F1, very low hazard fireworks<sup>3</sup>, any

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1553/pdfs/ukxi\\_20151553\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1553/pdfs/ukxi_20151553_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/application-form-category-f2-garden-fireworks-licence>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Application-form-for-a-Category-F2-%28garden%29-fireworks-licence.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/justice/criminal\\_law/criminal\\_offences/the\\_law\\_on\\_fireworks.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/justice/criminal_law/criminal_offences/the_law_on_fireworks.html)

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Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, Volume 48, Issue 3, Pages 367-386, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cvsm.2017.12.005>.

Linn Mari Storengen, Frode Lingaas, 2015. Noise sensitivity in 17 dog breeds: Prevalence, breed risk and correlation with fear in other situations, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 171, Pages 152-160, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2015.08.020>.

Blackwell, E., Casey, R., & Bradshaw, J , 2013. Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 145, Issues 1–2, 2013, Pages 15-25,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2012.12.004>.

[World Horse Welfare: Fireworks](#)

Sulser, C.E. Steck, B.I & Baur, B (2008) Effects of construction noise on behaviour of and

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In addition, we would suggest setting up an on-line registration system for private or residential users of fireworks who intend to hold a private event involving fireworks, other than Category 1, very low hazard fireworks (see paragraph 18 above).

### **Are the public and event organisers sufficiently aware of the necessary safety precautions when using fireworks?**

- 26 We consider that the government should improve public and event organiser awareness of the potential negative impact of fireworks on animal health and welfare by disseminating messaging through its communications channels, particularly around the traditional dates when fireworks are used eg. Bonfire Night (5 November), New Year, Chinese New Year, Diwali. This could be paired with a cross-stakeholder, collaborative approach with veterinary associations and animal welfare organisations, who continue to issue timely advice to animal owners on how to prepare their pets for firework displays and prevent or manage possible distress.
- 27 We would encourage owners and animal keepers who are concerned about potential fear or stress responses in their animals to consult with their veterinary surgeon, if possible well in advance of firework displays. Veterinary surgeons will be able to advise on evidence-based therapies for fear or stress responses or refer to an animal behaviourist<sup>7891011</sup> to improve the welfare of the animals under their care.
- 28 In addition, Government guidance on the responsible use of fireworks should highlight the potential negative impact of fireworks on animal health and welfare as a key area for event organisers to consider in their planning of displays eg. in the Department for Communities and Local Government document [Celebrating with bonfires and fireworks: a community guide to organising bonfires and fireworks](#).
- 29 Similarly, if the Government were to require that all public displays and commercial organised events using fireworks should be licensed by the relevant authority, it would be able to stipulate that as part of licensing conditions the license holder must pay due regard to how their firework display may impact on companion animals, wildlife, horses and livestock (eg. distance from livestock and wildlife rich sites, measures to ensure there is no left-over debris) in the local area and give local residents advance notice of the planned display.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bvba.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://capbt.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.apbc.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/general/findabehaviourist>



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