

Joint BVA, BVNA, BSAVA and SPVS response to the Defra consultation on Cat and Dog Microchipping and Scanning in England

17 February 2021

Who we are

1. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 18,000 members, our primary aim is to represent,
ry profession. We therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.
2. The British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) is the largest membership body of veterinary nurses in the UK with over 6,000 members. It is also the official representative body for veterinary nursing in the UK. In addition to support for its Membership, key activities of the BVNA include an Annual Congress in October and a wide range of accredited CPD courses, including online seminars. The BVNA also publishes the VNJ (Veterinary Nursing Journal).
3. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) exists to promote excellence in small animal practice through education and science and is the largest specialist division of BVA representing nearly 10,000 members.
4. The Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) is the division of the BVA with a primary focus on matters concerning vets in practice and the practices where they work. SPVS is a not-for-profit organisation for professionals within the veterinary industry. SPVS promotes responsible leadership by providing tools and resources that enable members to develop and expand their business and leadership skills.
5. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on compulsory cat microchipping and potential scanning reform.

Summary of our positions

6. Compulsory cat microchipping
We recognise that the microchipping of cats has the potential to improve animal welfare and promote responsible ownership.¹ We therefore support the microchipping of cats as a safe, effective, and permanent way to identify individual animals, as well as a way to facilitate the quick identification of lost pets if requiring veterinary treatment, and reunite lost pets with their owners.
7. However, we currently have concerns about making cat microchipping compulsory. Any proposed legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats must be clear in its aims, what public or animal welfare issue it is trying to address and how it will be enforced. To ensure successful implementation, adequate resources must be in place to support enforcement.
8. Crucially, before considering the introduction of compulsory microchipping for cats, the UK governments must address, and learn from, the issues that are currently preventing the effective implementation of the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015. These include:

Ensuring the responsibilities of keepers, new keepers, vets and local authorities are clearly and consistently communicated to all stakeholders, including encouraging owners to make sure that their contact details are up to date.

¹ To ensure that microchipping is successful in its aims, it is important that all microchips are ISO compliant.

Establishing a central microchipping database, or a single point of entry to query the existing multiple real-time databases that currently exist.

9. As part of this, Defra should first consider and address any issues identified by the Post



13. However, as each case will be different, it is essential that vets can exercise their own professional judgement in these situations in order to safeguard animal welfare and public safety.

Question 1: Would you like to see compulsory cat microchipping introduced in England?

14. We recognise that the microchipping of cats has the potential to improve animal welfare and promote responsible ownership.² The ability to individually identify owned cats and trace the keeper has the potential to improve animal welfare and promote responsible ownership by enabling:

Lost, stray and stolen cats to be returned to their owners more rapidly³

Quicker identification of injured cats meaning that owners are contacted more quickly for veterinary treatment to be agreed and undertaken promptly;

Quicker and more accurate identification of dead cats and notification to owners;

Health test results to be correctly attributed to an individual animal;

Population data regarding cats to be collected allowing more accurate prevalence data to be calculated;

Tracing and identification of animals in the event of a disease outbreak, such as Rabies;

Reinforcement of responsibilities of the owner under the Animal Welfare Act;

Microchip activated technology, such as pet feeders or cat flaps, to support weight management and prevent unwanted animals the home;

Easier detection of cat theft;

Easier identification and subsequent arrest of owners culpable of animal cruelty; and

Reduction of potential for fraud at cat shows.

15. However, we currently have concerns about making cat microchipping compulsory. Any proposed legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats must be clear in its aims, what public or animal welfare issue it is trying to address and how it will be enforced. To ensure successful implementation, adequate resources must be in place to support enforcement. It is also important to recognise that microchipping is not definitive proof of ownership.

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19. There is currently a total of 15 national databases with which pet owners can choose to register their animals. These databases do not currently share their data with each other, nor is there a central database. This is a growing issue, which threatens one of the key aims of compulsory microchipping of dogs, and the central policy objective of compulsory cat microchipping proposals to help reunite lost animals with their owners.
20. Our Voice of the Veterinary Profession 2019 showed that the most common reason for being unable



27. While we understand the rationale for limiting legislation to owned cats with identifiable keepers, we remain concerned that this is not workable in practice as establishing ownership and identifying keepers with which cats normally reside is often not clear cut.

Question 3: Do you support the proposal that cats should be microchipped by 16 weeks of age unless there is an animal health reason certified by a vet?

28. If compulsory microchipping of cats is to be introduced, legislation should specify an age range within which a cat should be microchipped that allows for these circumstances, as opposed to an age limit. We would therefore support a range of 8 weeks onwards and no later than 20 weeks unless there is an animal health reason certified for a vet. This would allow for age of implantation to be size, temperament, response to handling, and opportunities to implant alongside other healthcare interventions eg neutering, and any other factors deemed relevant (notably, many of these interventions are likely to occur following the first transfer of ownership of a kitten).

- 29.

communicated to all stakeholders (including new keepers, vets and local authorities) in the proposed lead-in period, and regularly thereafter.

34. This lead-in period would also present a timely opportunity to reiterate the responsibilities of keepers, new keepers, vets and local authorities under the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 to all stakeholders. Emphasis should be given to reiterating the need for keepers to work with the government, competent authorities, and other stakeholders to achieve this through a government-led communications campaign.

Question 5: Which form of enforcement powers do you support for cat microchipping, and for what reason(s)?

35. If compulsory cat microchipping is to be introduced, adequate resources must be in place to support the effective enforcement of new legislation. When considering which form of enforcement powers would be most appropriate and effective, Defra should first consider any enforcement issues identified by the Post Implementation Review of the 2015 compulsory dog microchipping regulations.
36. It is important to reiterate that vets should not be required to enforce compulsory cat microchipping or verify ownership. As we set out below, we strongly oppose compulsory scanning by vets on animal welfare and public safety grounds. [Read our position on microchip scanning \(dogs\) and databases in full.](#)

Potential scanning reform

37. We strongly oppose proposals to introduce compulsory scanning, on animal welfare and public safety grounds. We recognise there has been some criticism of the profession from campaigners calling for compulsory scanning. Unfortunately, such campaigns misunderstand the powers of vets and the potential welfare harms of compulsory scanning to both animals and humans (eg those fleeing with their pets from domestic abuse).
38. Primary consideration - animal health and welfare
On admission to membership of the RCVS, and in exchange for the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK, every veterinary surgeon makes a declaration:

*" I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and that, ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."*¹¹

39. With the declaration in mind, vets play a key role in helping to reunite lost, and sometimes stolen, animals with their owner. However, if the veterinary profession were required to play a role in consequences for animal welfare by compromising the vet-owner relationship. This crucial relationship is based on trust and confidentiality and if compromised could act as a disincentive to accessing veterinary advice protect animal health and welfare
40. It is also important to recognise that the circumstances surrounding the individual cases which present themselves in veterinary practices are sometimes not clear cut and there will be a need for the vet to exercise their professional judgement, based on the information available to them. Vets must also operate within their powers, so cannot seize or hold a dog or cat suspected as stolen, nor can they share confidential ownership information as this would breach data protection laws and, in some circumstances, could put the animal, its owner, or its finder, at risk. Where there is an

ownership dispute or an animal is suspected stolen vets are advised to follow the _____

41. We already recommend that veterinary practices should scan for a microchip under the following circumstances:

Prior to microchip implantation this helps to ensure that there is no other microchip present.

On presentation of a lost, stray or apparently unowned animal this facilitates

45. For compulsory microchipping legislation to be effective, it is essential that there is one central UK microchip database that is maintained and up-to-date. However, we recognise that this may be a challenge given the proliferation of commercial databases in recent years, and so the implementation of one central UK microchip database is unlikely. Instead, we are calling for:

All existing and future commercial microchip databases to register with [EuroPetNet](#). Petlog is currently the only UK database to be registered¹².

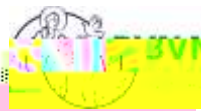
Improved enforcement in relation to those databases which do not meet government standards. Exploration of the potential for setting up a single point of entry to query existing multiple real-time databases. The facility to enter a microchip number into a single web-based portal that could check all microchip databases would minimise the need for a manual search, increasing efficiency and protecting commercial interests.

Question 6: Do you think veterinarians and other bodies who legally euthanise should be required to scan cats and dogs prior to euthanasia?

46. We strongly oppose this proposal. As outlined above, we already recommend that veterinary practices should scan for a microchip prior to euthanasia, if considered appropriate, as part of good clinical practice and where there exists any doubt so as to make sure that the patient is matched to clinical record. However, as each case will be different, it is essential that vets are allowed to exercise their professional judgement in these situations in order to safeguard animal welfare and public safety.
47. It is important to emphasise that, as animal health and welfare professionals with years of training, veterinary professionals are best placed to advise on whether euthanasia would be in the best
48. A their care. If vets were required to scan, verify and resolve owner disputes prior to euthanasia, this has the strong potential to delay the provision of euthanasia, which may ultimately negatively impact is considered necessary to prevent ongoing pain or suffering. In addition, vets need to be empathetic in scenarios where euthanasia is distressing and emotional for owners and unnecessary scanning of microchips may serve to exacerbate the situation. Not least, a vet may consider that it is in the wider public interest to euthanase a dangerous dog, to prevent further dog biting incidents or attacks. In this scenario, delaying euthanasia to resolve an ownership dispute may put public safety at risk. Further, it may also result in the client taking matters into their own hands and inhumanely euthanising the dog themselves.
49. How vets approach requests to euthanase healthy animals
This can often present a difficult ethical dilemma for many veterinary surgeons, who must consider both their duties to the animal and to their client. Vets may accede to the wish to proceed with euthanasia, but do not have to do so. Each case must be considered individually; there will be occasions where it is appropriate to advise or request another opinion and if euthanasia is refused, this should always be offered to the client. It is important to emphasise that euthanasia itself is not a welfare issue when performed correctly.
50. When presented with a healthy animal and a request for euthanasia, a veterinary surgeon will discuss all of the available interventions with the client so that they can make an informed choice as to the most appropriate course of action. Depending on the individual case and previous behaviour of the dog or cat, this may include other treatment options, referral to a dog behaviourist, referral back to the rescue centre if the dog was rehomed with known behavioural/health issues, or euthanasia. It is important to emphasise here that appropriate treatment options may have a significant cost and be time intensive, meaning that it may not be a suitable option for some clients.



51.



A new client who had recently rehomed a dog asked his vet how he should go about transferring the

woman who had relinquish the dog to escape an abusive relationship. The new owner also mentioned that he still had some links to the woman who had relinquished the dog.

As it was the first time the vet had seen the dog, the vet scanned its microchip, however i whose name the chip has been registered in, that of the woman or her abusive partner. When a vet is

Question 12: What costs would a requirement to scan for microchips in these circumstances generate to groups of organisations referenced above?

57. Policy makers should not oversimplify the impact of scanning microchips based purely on a raw consult times (which may not go to plan themselves), which then has a knock-on effect on the time