

DOG LAW IRELAND'S PAWSITIVE PLEDGE

General election candidates - 2024 is your chance to **lead the pack** and make a **pawsitive change** to dog welfare in Ireland.

Ireland is in the midst of a dog crisis with pounds and rescue organisations at breaking point. In October 2024, the 2023 Dog Control Statistics were published and show extremely worrying trends:

- **7,510 dogs entered the pound** which is an **80% increase since 2021**.
- Moreover, **596 dogs were euthanised** which is a **257% increase since 2021**.

As of October 2024, there are **2,924 homeless dogs** looking for homes (per the dog census undertaken by MADRA, Galway County Council and the Department of Rural and Community Development which surveyed 120+ rescues and local authority pounds).

Ireland's poor regulatory framework around dog breeding is a huge contributing factor to the dog crisis with an estimated **30,000+ puppies** being produced in puppy factories every year and back-yard breeders producing thousands more. Ireland simply cannot keep up with the numbers that are being bred and then subsequently surrendered, abandoned, dumped or in the worst case scenarios, euthanised.

We are also witnessing unprecedented levels of animal cruelty with the ISPCA noting that calls on their helpline have increased by 499% from 2013 to 2023.

The implementation of S.I. No. 491/2024 - Control of Dogs (XL Bully) Regulations 2024 (i.e. the "**XL Bully Ban**") has also added further pressure to an already broken dog welfare system. Whilst the government needs to take action to promote responsible dog ownership and increase public safety, breed bans have been shown time and time again to be an ineffective means to achieve this (click [here](#) to read Dog Law Ireland's open letter to Minister Humphreys in relation to the XL Bully Type Ban).

It's time to make a pawsitive change!

By taking the pledge today, you pledge to be a "**pawsitive leader**" and proactively effect and/or support the pawsitive changes for dog welfare in Ireland listed in the **Appendix** below.

Dog Law Ireland (a group set up by three solicitors; Hannah Unger, Demi Mullen & Carrie McMeel to provide information in relation Irish dog laws) will publicise which general election candidates have signed the pledge before the elections so everyone will see who is a '**Pawsitive Leader**' and who is not.

You can make the pledge by filling out the following and returning it by email to doglawireland@gmail.com.

THE PAWSITIVE PLEDGE

*Constituency: _____

*Party: _____

*First Name: _____

*Last Name: _____

*Email: _____

☐ I am a Candidate of the General Elections 2024

☐ I pledge to be a “pawsitive leader” and proactively effect and support pawsitive changes for dog welfare in Ireland as detailed in the Appendix to Dog Law Ireland’s Pawsitive Pledge.

Comment: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX - DOG LAW IRELAND'S PAWSITIVE REFORMS

A number of these reforms refer to recommendations made in the “Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland” paper prepared by Hannah Unger, Rory Ferguson and Dearbhla Walsh of Fieldfisher LLP. The paper was prepared a pro bono basis after a comprehensive review of Irish legislation and international law / best practice was undertaken, to suggest practical, measured and effective reforms.

STRENGTHENING EXISTING LEGISLATION IN RELATION TO DOG BREEDING IN IRELAND

The Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 and the Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet Regulations) 2019 should be amended / enhanced by way of a number of short-term and long-term aims. [See pages 9-28 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

CONSOLIDATING POLICY GENERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ONE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

The area of dog breeding, control of dogs and dog health and welfare should come under the remit of one government department rather than two government departments (as is the current position). For example, [see page 28 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

INCENTIVISED NEUTERING

Incentives for neutering should be introduced, such as reduced fees for dog licences of owners of neutered dogs. There should also be a reimbursement scheme for neutering costs for dog welfare organisations that assist with state dogs. [See pages 29-30 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

BANNING SURGICAL INSEMINATION / REGULATING CANINE FERTILITY

Surgical artificial insemination (where the breeding bitch is cut open and the uterus removed) should be banned for all dogs (including greyhounds) at a legislative level. Canine fertility clinics should be regulated. [See page 30 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#) Sufficient legislative measures should also be implemented to prevent extreme conformation in dogs.

ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT REGULATOR

An independent regulator should be established, whose statutory remit includes (inter alia):

- Educating the public on things like dog bite prevention, children and dogs, responsible dog ownership etc.

- Facilitating research, developing policies, procedures, guidelines relating to dog control, dog welfare etc.
- Overseeing the work of the relevant departments when it comes to dog breeding and dog control, etc.

In the meantime, until an independent regulator is established, all local authorities should have mandatory reporting obligations on their activities to the Department of Rural Community and Development (and / or Agriculture, once all dog related issues are brought under one department's remit). All Dog Breeding Establishments should be subject to unannounced inspections by an independent team of Department inspectors. [See pages 31-32 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

IMPROVING THE MICROCHIPPING SYSTEM & LICENSING SYSTEM

It is essential that the Microchipping of Dogs Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 63/2015) is amended to improve the microchipping system in Ireland. A centralised online microchip database needs to be established which will be accessible to authorised officers, capable of supporting relevant legislation in a GDPR compliant fashion, and that the quality of data stored on a microchip be improved. There should be the establishment of an online publicly searchable commercial breeder database which will display; breeder name, type of licence, licence number, county, number of breeding bitches held, number of dogs sold in the previous year. Registered sellers should also be captured. [See pages 32-36 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

There should also be greater enforcement of the licensing system. The State is missing out on a huge amount of licence fees that could be used to invest in its dog control system. Licence fees could go towards funding an independent regulator.

Owners should also have to provide their dog's microchip number to obtain a dog licence to ensure greater compliance with microchipping requirements and allow for better collection of data.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF DATA

The quality of data gathered in relation to dog breeding and ownership of dogs needs to be improved to better inform policymaking. It is essential that such data gathered should be fed back to the Department of Rural Community and Development / Agriculture quarterly to ensure that data is kept as up to date as possible. [See page 37 of the Fieldfisher LLP pro bono paper 'Key Reforms to Dog Breeding in Ireland'.](#)

Further, given the emphasis on control of dogs at present, there should be a straight forward procedure for reporting dog bites and / or dogs deemed to be aggressive, which can allow anonymity. This must then be followed up on seriously, with a fair outcome for dog, owner, and human safety.

On top of this, there should be thorough investigations of dog bites by the regulator. Data is currently not being recorded (e.g. breed of dog, how long the owner was in possession of the dog, had the dog previously attended with a trainer, where was the dog sourced from (e.g. breeder, rescue, etc), were the dogs needs being met, the full circumstances of the incident etc). This data could then be used to form a picture in relation to the incidents that are emerging which could help inform policy making.

CONTROL OF DOGS LEGISLATION

The Control of Dogs legislation should be reviewed in detail and an effective overhaul should be undertaken with a focus on breed neutral policies. The Government should effect legislation that is in line with evidence and expert opinion in the area. Some suggested reforms are:

- Serious penalties for those who are responsible for a dog that is knowingly aggressive and they have not acted upon minimising the risk of this dog.
- Thorough investigations of dog bites by an independent regulator (once established).
- More dog wardens who have undergone appropriate training to carry out their duties effectively and fairly.
- Introduction of mandatory theory tests (valid for 10 years) to obtain a dog licence. The theory test should cover things like socialising a puppy, responsible dog ownership (including respecting other dog owners), understanding dog body language (which is key to bite prevention), understanding the dangerous side effects to using painful training tools, etc. All of this information needs to be carefully understood before owning a dog.
- Serious regulation of the dog training industry with a ban on the use of aversives, as studies show that punishment leads to increase in aggression.
- Temperament / character testing for restricted breeds.
- Mandatory veterinary check-ups annually for pain, as pain is often a contributing factor in aggression.

GREYHOUND RACING

Given the revelations of “RTE Investigates – Running for their Lives”, a documentary on the greyhound racing industry in Ireland, which aired in 2019, and the fact that no evidence has been put forward to show that welfare within the greyhound racing industry has improved, greyhound racing should be banned in Ireland.

The airing of the documentary highlighted severe issues with the greyhound racing industry, including the euthanasia of thousands of dogs (some under a year old) deemed too slow and the use of illegal drugs.

Animal welfare organisations should be consulted heavily as to the best way to do this to ensure the welfare of all greyhounds in the industry. In the meantime:

1. Surgical artificial insemination in greyhounds should be banned;
2. Public funding to the greyhound racing industry should cease;
3. More stringent inspections and regulations should be put in place to ensure better treatment of greyhounds;
4. Additional funding should be allocated towards greyhound welfare programs, including rehoming initiatives.

GREATER FUNDING TO ANIMAL WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

Approximately €20million was awarded to the greyhound racing industry this year, which pales in comparison to the total of €6million split between 101 animal welfare charities in 2024. This means there was only no increase in funding to animal welfare charities from 2023, which does not seem to adequately take into the consideration the increase of dogs in pounds and shelters which has been highlighted above.

CRUELTY CASES

Significant resources should be given to ensure that all instances of animal cruelty can be prosecuted to the full extent. Work should be done to ensure that sentencing of animal cruelty cases is sufficient and consistent, particularly in respect of bans on keeping animals.

All too often horrific cases of cruelty / neglect are reported in the media and very short disqualification periods are imposed by the courts and once the period ends, these people are free to own and potentially abuse animals again in the future. This sends a very poor message to the public that animal welfare is not taken seriously and fails to act as the necessary deterrent to prevent future behaviour. As such, an amendment to s58 of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 (as amended) is required to ensure that following a conviction for cruelty, **lifetime disqualification orders are imposed by default 'unless the Court sees good reason not to do so'**. This stipulation would ensure that the Court's discretion is not fettered but will encourage a more consistent and rigorous approach to protecting animal welfare.