House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

12 November 2026

Dear Angela,

We are writing further to the passage of the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025, which received Royal Assent on 2 December 2025.

As you will know, Sections 1–7 of the Act, which contain its substantive provisions, require a commencement order before they can take effect. Nearly a year has now passed since Royal Assent, yet the necessary order has still not been brought forward. You will be aware that we recently tabled a Written Parliamentary Question on this matter, in response to which we were informed that a timetable would be provided "in due course". We are increasingly concerned by the continued lack of progress.

The importance of this legislation to animal welfare cannot be overstated. Ear cropping is a cruel, painful and entirely unnecessary mutilation, prohibited in the UK under Section 5 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Carried out purely for cosmetic reasons, often without appropriate veterinary oversight or pain relief, it causes significant and avoidable suffering. Yet, until the 2025 Act is commenced, dogs subjected to this practice overseas can still be legally imported into the UK.

The Act introduces a range of vital protections. These include tackling the illegal importation of puppies, prohibiting the import of dogs and cats subjected to unlawful mutilations such as ear cropping and declawing, raising the minimum age at which puppies can enter the UK, and preventing the importation of heavily pregnant dogs and cats. These measures are essential not only to protect animal welfare but also to safeguard public health.

We have been in close contact with animal welfare organisations, which have raised serious concerns about the consequences of this delay. They report that, immediately following Royal Assent, there was a short-lived reduction in the importation of mutilated animals and heavily pregnant dogs, as those involved in these practices initially assumed the new legislation would come into force without delay. However, as it has become apparent that the substantive provisions have not yet come into force, this initial deterrent effect has diminished, and illegal activity appears to be increasing again.

Indeed, although there was a brief reduction in seizures of potentially non-compliant dogs around the passage of the Act, we understand that numbers have since begun to rise towards previous levels. This is deeply concerning and underlines the importance of moving swiftly to implement the legislation. There is little value in Parliament approving important animal welfare protections if unnecessary delays prevent them from being put into practice.

In light of this, we would be grateful if you could provide a clear indication of when the Government intends to lay the necessary commencement order.

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Given the serious and continuing welfare implications, we would urge the Government to prioritise this without further delay and ensure that the protections Parliament has approved are brought into force as soon as possible, for the sake of animal welfare.

We look forward to hearing from you urgently.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Neil Hudson MP
Shadow Minister for Water, Biosecurity and Animals

The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Robbie Moore MP
Shadow Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food

Aphra Brandreth MP
Shadow Minister for Nature

The Lord Roborough
Shadow Minister for Rural and Coastal Growth

The Rt Hon the Lord Blencathra
Shadow Lords Minister (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)