

CAAR update March 2014. The campaign is now over 8 months old. Thank you to all those who have signed the petition, and who have posted so many thoughtful and supportive comments. The reality is that the campaign has failed to gain enough support for the issue of an animal abuser register to be taken up at government level, which is what it needs for any progress to be made. There has been increased interest this month, possibly because of a recent Bristol case where a dog starved to death after his owner locked him into her flat and left him. It's that reality, when people realise that whatever punishment the abuser gets, there's no practical measure to prevent them going out and getting another dog, even if barred from keeping one. It brings it home why we need an Animal Abusers Register.

With less than a thousand signatures backing the campaign, we realise that CAAR just did not seem important enough, or relevant enough, to engage the thousands of people who saw the petition. The question we ask ourselves at this stage is where do we go from here.

You may know about the Campaign for a Welsh Animal Offenders Register last year. To their credit, the Petitions Committee of the Welsh National Assembly launched a consultation, involving the British Veterinary Association, Animal Aid, the RSPCA and other organisations. Copied below is the response from DEFRA:

Thank you for your letter of 27 February about a petition received by the National Assembly for Wales in support of the creation of an Animal Offenders Register.

The Government has no proposals to introduce a database of animal abusers, which I consider would raise civil rights and data protection issues. I am also unsure how such a system would be enforceable, given how easy it is for animals to change hands.

The police already have access to a national database of offenders. The courts have the power to ban anyone who has been convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal from keeping animals for as long as they consider is appropriate. Anyone who is found to be in breach of an order prohibiting them from keeping animals would be committing an offence.



THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP

What about the Welsh branch of the RSPCA? :

'We hope that this brief response is somewhat helpful in your considerations. As stated earlier, we would be extremely pleased to work with the Assembly further to develop these proposals further and determine what help and role the RSPCA can provide. We would also suggest that this area is in urgent need of criminological study to examine sentences and their relationship to recidivism in this sector, coupled with an analysis of how restorative justice may present opportunities for thorough and longlasting behaviour change. We have strong links to the criminology departments of the main Universities in Wales and we would be happy to assist in designing such a study.'

On THE 4TH June 2013, the Committee considered the correspondence on the petition and agreed to close the petition because of the 'practical, legal and ethical concerns highlighted in the consultation responses which mean that such a register would not be practical.'

So far as we know, the matter rests there.

Where do we go from here, with CAAR? It's all still going on, we all see the images of the tortured bodies, we all hear about the light sentences, and those of us who care know that not enough is being done to protect animals from humans who continue to torture and kill. The Register would be a start. In the USA, where they have Animal Abuser Registries set up, we asked how these were going, shortly after CAAR was set up. The answer we got from a committed US animal activist, sadly doesn't help..

'-- the fact is that the AARs in the US are, frankly, NOT working. In the three counties in New York State that implemented them, only one person is on the list. None of the other registries have any. The lists sound great, and might be politically popular, but they are frightfully expensive to enforce, law enforcement agencies feel they have more important things to do. Sorry to be the bearer of bad tidings.'

Do most people just not care about animals? We can take comfort from the fact that many people in the UK do care about animals, and do think that animal suffering is wrong, and care enough to report animal abuse cases, many times every day, to the RSPCA. People do sign up, in their tens and hundreds of thousands, to protest against the suffering of factory farmed animals and other institutionalised and legalised animal suffering. There is enormous support in the UK and abroad for better animal protection law and better regulations. We can all speculate on why that isn't being made to happen at government level, but this bulletin isn't really the place for that.

Thank you again to those of you who did care enough to sign the petition. CAAR will remain live until its anniversary in August and we will post a further bulletin then.