



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Government response to the Animal Sentience Committee report on XL Bullies and the Dangerous Dogs Act

March 2026

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Affairs**

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 3 of the **Animal
Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022**

We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

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Summary

This is the government's formal response to the Animal Sentience Committee's report on XL Bullies and the Dangerous Dogs Act which was published on 27 November 2025. We thank the Animal Sentience Committee for their assessment and recommendations, which we have carefully considered. Ministers will consider the recommendations of the Responsible Dog Ownership taskforce which will help shape our future approach.

Introduction

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 ('the act') was enacted to address the threat to the public from dog attacks. The act contains a number of broad powers for tackling dangerous dogs.

Section 1 of the act prohibits the ownership, breeding, gifting and sale of five types of dog: the Pit Bull terrier, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro, Japanese Tosa and XL Bully (the latter having been added in 2024).

Under Section 2, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has the power to impose certain restrictions on any type of dog that presents a serious danger to the public. The restrictions include requirements to keep a specified breed or type on a lead and muzzled when in public, and to prevent abandonment or escape.

Under Section 3, if any dog (regardless of breed) is dangerously out of control in any place, including all private property, the owner, or person for the time being in charge of the dog, is guilty of an offence. If found guilty the dog can be euthanised and their owner put in prison for up to 14 years and disqualified from owning a dog for a period set by the court.

Recommendations

The decision to add XL Bully breed type dogs to the list of banned breed dogs under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was made following an unacceptable increase in dog attacks in recent years and the disproportionate involvement of XL Bullies in this rise.

Defra completed de minimis impact assessments to understand the impact ahead of the decision to ban. Officials worked closely with veterinary groups, animal welfare stakeholders, and microchipping businesses to collect the best available data to estimate the number of XL Bully type dogs. Defra also reviewed pet selling websites and visited police and local authority kennels, to inform this estimate. This information was used to estimate the number of XL Bully type dogs in England and Wales. However, as highlighted by the Animal Sentience Committee, the evidence base was limited and the actual number of dogs exempted exceeded initial estimates. The Animal Sentience Committee concluded that this led to a greater welfare impact than

anticipated, specifically in relation to seizure of dogs, prolonged kennelling and lifelong behavioural restrictions.

We appreciate that seizing and keeping dogs in kennels for extended periods can have negative implications for their welfare. Alongside the ban on XL Bully type dogs, Defra introduced an exemption scheme, enabling owners to register to keep their dog. The scheme was open from 14 November 2023 until 31 January 2024, giving owners an extended period in which to comply to avoid committing a criminal offence and prevent their dog being seized by the police. Defra provided clear guidance on this scheme, released regular communications to raise awareness of the new requirements and provided tailored support to owners applying for exemption certificates ahead of the deadline. Over 57,000 owners registered their XL Bully type dog under this scheme. Where owners did not comply with the restrictions as they came into force, they were committing a criminal offence and their dog could be seized. This is an important enforcement tool for the protection of public safety in cases of non-compliance.

At the same time as launching the exemption scheme, Defra also launched a compensation scheme for owners who chose not to keep their dog. Whilst we recognise that euthanasia can cause distress, providing a compensation scheme is a requirement under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Only 406 dogs were euthanised and compensation claimed under this scheme, a far smaller number than the number of dogs registered.

We also recognise that the requirement to keep prohibited breeds on a lead and muzzled in public can negatively impact the welfare of these dogs, by restricting their behaviour. However, this requirement reflects a balance between ensuring that dogs can be exercised in public places whilst protecting the public from dog attacks.

Moving forward, we continue to engage closely with the police, local authorities, and rescue and rehoming organisations to monitor the impacts of the XL Bully dog ban. We are supporting the police to enforce the ban and provided £9.5 million in funding to cover the costs of kennelling and veterinary care. Additionally, we have completed an upgrade to our Dangerous Dogs database, including giving the police real-time access to the records on all registered dogs. We continue to work with the police to streamline processes, reducing the time that dogs spend in kennels.

As part of our wider approach, Defra reconvened the Responsible Dog Ownership taskforce, to explore measures to promote responsible dog ownership across all breeds. The taskforce has considered the role of education and training, for both dogs and their owners, in reducing the risk of dog attacks and has also explored improving data collection and recording so that we are in a better position to take action. Ministers will consider the recommendations of the taskforce and we will outline next steps in due course. We will continue to work with stakeholders to promote public

awareness of safety around dogs and to raise awareness of existing powers amongst enforcement authorities.

We would like to thank the Committee for its consideration of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the addition of XL Bully type breeds. This legislation remains an important part of protecting the public from dog attacks, within a wider approach to responsible dog ownership.

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