



**Puppy Love** CAMPAIGNS

# **An overview of the retail puppy trade**

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## Murphy's tale

Murphy is a Cocker Spaniel. He was born in Ireland, but he doesn't live there.

Soon after he was weaned, he was taken away from his mother, put in a cage and packed onto a lorry with many other puppies. They were driven to the port of Dublin and put on a ferry across the Irish Sea to Liverpool.

From there he was taken to a warehouse near Manchester where his cage was unloaded and he stayed there for several days.

Then some men came and put him in the back of a van, along with five of his fellow pups, and drove all of them to a pet shop in London.

Six hours later he was in a pen with a price ticket on the front of it, but he wasn't feeling very well.

Murphy's luck began to change when a lady saw him in his pen and felt sorry for him because he looked so small and poorly. She thought he needed medical attention and she bought him and took him straight to a vet.

He was by then 11 weeks old but still knew nothing of play, or cuddles and kindness from humans. The vet suspected pneumonia and admitted Murphy to the animal hospital.

For the next 2 days, he was on a drip and intravenous antibiotics, having been confirmed as suffering from pneumonia. He remained on medication at home for another 3 weeks, but made only slow progress, so went back to the vet for a chest x-ray and to have fluid drained from his lungs.

Finally, after laboratory analysis of the lung fluid indicated a need for different antibiotics, Murphy started on the road to recovery.

## The public face of puppy farming

No responsible dog breeder will sell their puppies to a third party dealer or pet shop. So where does that beguiling puppy you see displayed in a cage, on the internet, or in the classified ads section of your local newspaper with just a mobile number, come from?

Unless you are able to see it with its mother on the premises where she lives with her owners, it will probably have been born and spent the first few weeks of its life in a dark, squalid prison, surrounded by faeces and urine. In other words, on a puppy farm.



It is likely to have been deprived of a proper diet and clean water and have had no interaction with humans or space to play with its siblings.

After all, as far as the person breeding it is concerned, it is a cash crop, so why waste time and money doing more than is absolutely necessary to keep it alive until it is sold on?

And it may well also have been removed from its mother well before the time that good practice dictates, so that it can start making money for those in the supply chain as early as possible.

As for its mother, she will stay in solitary confinement regularly producing new litters until she is too old or too ill to earn any more cash for the farm owner. Then she will either be dumped on a rescue shelter, shot, or clubbed to death.

Believe it or not, many of these establishments which flout the laws for animal welfare in England, Scotland and Wales, not to mention human decency, are operating with the tacit blessing of those with the power to stop them. Their local licensing authority.

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## What does this mean for a puppy and its future owner?

The breeder may sell it direct to a retail vendor, either a pet shop or trader, or more likely, as part of a job lot to a wholesale dealer. It may then pass through several other hands before finally being offered to the public.

In either case, it is likely to have travelled hundreds of miles from its place of birth to the point of sale.

If it's lucky, it will have been transported for at least the first part of its journey on the UK mainland in accordance with the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006*, which lays down minimum standards and is mirrored in Wales and Scotland. Of course there are many in this trade who have scant regard for the law.

Whether its initial journey was in a properly equipped vehicle or in the back of an old van, it will probably have been in the company of many others of its kind. Even if it was free of disease at the outset, the odds are against it when it reaches its final destination.

The stress of its situation and weakened immune system, due to a lack of proper care from birth, will make it susceptible to a range of infections.



Gastro enteritis, various intestinal complaints, kennel cough and pneumonia frequently occur in puppies sold through these channels, although not always obvious at the time of purchase. Parvo virus, although fortunately less common, still appears far too often in these animals.

Sadly, however serious these diseases, and all of them could be fatal, or how costly veterinary treatment might be, they may still be only a foretaste of the heartbreak and expense yet to come.

Heart abnormalities, skeletal deformities, hip dysplasia and other joint defects, diabetes, epilepsy, cataracts and auto immune system failure are just a few examples of the hereditary conditions that can arise as a result of totally irresponsible and callous breeding practices.

Of course no-one can guarantee that breed specific health issues won't ever surface in even a well planned litter. The difference though, is that a responsible breeder will do everything they can to minimise the possibility by only selecting well researched and health screened dogs for breeding.

A puppy farmer on the other hand will throw any suitable bitch and dog together, regardless of whether either or both already show signs of hereditary conditions or deformities, and to increase the problem, whether they are closely related.

By now you might be thinking it can't get any worse.....but oh yes it can. It is well established that the period between 6 and 12 to 14 weeks is the most important development period in a puppy's life.

What it learns in that time, both good and bad, can have a lasting effect for the rest of its life. And how has it spent most of it? Isolated from interaction with caring humans, lacking any stimulation or exposure to play, frequently competing for food and forced to relieve itself in its cramped living space.

Not very surprising then that it's common for puppies reaching their eventual homes through pet shops and traders to exhibit behavioural problems such as possessiveness over food and toys, difficulty with house training and in the worst case, aggression.

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## Aren't there rules for this sort of thing?



To understand how this trade developed, we have to go back to the middle of the last century and beyond. There was no internet, no mobile phone network, less than 50% of households had a landline phone and car ownership for all was decades away.

Pet shops were strictly local businesses and most of them sold small animals. Neutering of dogs was not the common practice it is today and many people found themselves with puppies, either by design or accident.

If someone had difficulty selling all of the puppies themselves, or didn't want the bother of selling an unwanted litter, the local pet shop would be happy to take them off their hands.

There was concern about the conditions animals were often kept in while they were awaiting sale in pet shops and the Parliament of the day introduced the *Pet Animals Act 1951*.

This specified that accommodation should be adequate, as should food and drink, that mammals should not be sold at too early an age, reasonable steps should be taken to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and that appropriate steps would be taken in an emergency.

Anyone running a business selling animals to the public required a licence from their local authority and it was the duty of the authority to set specific conditions which it felt were necessary to satisfy the broad requirements of the Act.

A set of model conditions was issued by the Local Government Association as a baseline guide for licensors in 1992 and updated in 1998. Individual authorities could of course add other conditions where they felt this is appropriate.

By the 1970s, the breeding of dogs had grown from its small scale local roots and commercial breeders were appearing as businesses supplying puppies for profit. To ensure reasonable welfare standards, the *Breeding of Dogs Act 1973* was introduced.

That required that anyone keeping more than two breeding bitches for the purpose of breeding should also be licensed by their local authority, which had the power to inspect premises to ensure compliance with the Act.

Further legislation relating to commercial dog breeders was introduced in 1991 and 1999 and the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* for England and Wales and its equivalent in Scotland, sets out broader requirements for anyone responsible for animals in any capacity.

New licensing requirements for dealers in young cats and dogs supplying stock to pet shops or retail traders were introduced in Scotland in 2009.

## Why is there still a problem then?

For starters, the law covering the regular sale of puppies to the public by anyone other than their breeder is now 60 years old.

Apart from a few very minor amendments over the years, its basic requirements are still as they were in 1951 and take no account of current best welfare practice or the retail methods used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And what about the supply channels?

Well, regulations for breeders have been improved and there are moves in Wales, the UK's centre for puppy farms, to tighten them much further. Hopefully England and Scotland will follow suit and this is certainly a step in the right direction.

Unfortunately it won't be enough. If local authorities properly use the powers we hope they will be given, it will help to improve welfare standards and practices among breeders.

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But only for those breeders identified as requiring a licence and even then, only if authorities monitor premises and enforce the regulations a lot more effectively than they have in the past.

We have substantial evidence of a lack of consistency by local authorities in monitoring and enforcing even basic health and welfare standards at UK breeders which have been granted a licence.

On top of that, many puppies sold in this country through pet shops and dealers originate from breeders in Ireland, beyond British control, and of course there are still numerous breeders in the UK operating illegally without a licence.

The *Pet Animals Act 1951* places no restriction on where a vendor acquires stock for sale.

In 2009, councillors at Swindon Borough Council came to the conclusion that it is impossible to be certain any puppy sourced from a puppy farm, would meet the requirements of the current Act in terms of minimum age or freedom from infectious diseases.

As a result, they introduced additional licence conditions relating to the sale of puppies which would effectively rule out a puppy farmer as a source of supply.

Among others, these include requirements that stock can only be acquired direct from the breeder, that breeders must be licensed or complying with a recognised code of conduct, that results of health tests relevant to the breed are supplied and that the breeder must be no further than 45 miles from the seller.

Other forward thinking authorities attempted to follow the same path, but after challenges from existing retailers and their trade association, the Pet Care Trust, on the grounds that these conditions exceeded the requirements of existing legislation, watered them down rather than face a judicial review.

A law which can be used to prevent the highest possible welfare standards is a bad law.

## **There is another way**

Every major independent organisation concerned with animal welfare has expressed the view that dogs are not a retail commodity and recommended that puppies should only be purchased direct from a responsible breeder.



When the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) introduced the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* it hailed it as the most significant piece of legislation in the field for 100 years.

It paved the way for more detailed secondary legislation to be brought in to address specific issues. One of the areas it intended to address in this way within 5 years, at least in England, was the sale of pet animals, by replacing the outdated *Pet Animals Act 1951*.

Even if the British Parliament lacks the courage to bring in an outright ban on third party businesses selling puppies in England, it already has the powers to radically overhaul the existing legislation. Governments in Scotland and Wales have the same opportunity.

No-one believes it will be easy to stamp out the puppy farm trade, but new regulations covering all potential retail sales channels and placing strong conditions and restrictions on the acquisition of stock would be another large nail in its coffin.

The responses by outside bodies to the post legislative assessment of the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* carried out by Defra were critical of its failure to meet the original timetable envisaged for secondary legislation.

We encourage everyone in England who feels the same to ask their MP to seek answers from the Secretary of State as to when she intends to instruct Defra officials to take action. Decisions in Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the national governments.