



# ConsultationResponse

FROM THE RSPCA IN WALES

---

## Consultation response: Local air quality and noise management in Wales

December 2016

RSPCA Cymru welcomes efforts to reduce noise pollution due to the effect on wild animals from anthropogenic noise such as cars, trains and planes. Tests have shown that traffic noise has reduced the density and species richness of woodland birds nesting in the immediate area<sup>1</sup> and impairs the foraging activity of bats.<sup>2</sup> Wild animals are affected by noise through acoustic masking, reduced attention and noise avoidance, affecting their ability to detect a target sound, impairing mental ability to forage and generally the animals avoiding the noisy forage area.

However, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that the focus of reducing noise pollution is aimed at road, rail and air and not from the variety of domestic causes that happen across the year and the affect they have on domestic, farm and wild animals. In particular RSPCA Cymru would like to highlight the noise pollution created by fireworks and the issue of dog barking. Although the consultation is to tackle permanent situations of air and noise pollution, temporary incidences of intense air and noise pollution equally can negatively affect the welfare of pets, their owners and wildlife.

Currently, fireworks can only be sold from licensed premises between 15 October to 15 November, 26 to 31 December and three days before Diwali and Chinese New Year and should not be set off between 11pm and 7am. It is estimated that around 45 percent of dogs show signs of fear when they hear fireworks<sup>3</sup>. This is distressing for the animal but also the owner. Local authorities should be encouraged to tackle incidents of firework use past 11pm. The RSPCA is calling for the Fireworks Act 2003 to be amended to reduce the maximum sound for fireworks from 120 decibels - the equivalent to a jet engine taking off at 100 metres - to 97 decibels.

Barking is a form of communication and is a normal part of dog behaviour. However, if the amount a dog barks increases or becomes excessive it can indicate a potential welfare problem including poor health, separation related behaviours, a lack of exercise and boredom. In addition, excessive barking may be considered a significant noise nuisance for other people. RSPCA Cymru would like to raise the issue of dog barking under this consultation to help ensure that owners of barking dogs are given sufficient support and advice to ensure their dogs welfare needs are met and to reduce noise disturbance for those in the community who may be affected.

Where dogs are considered by the community to be a noise nuisance, owners should be supported through advice and information to help identify and treat the underlying cause of the barking in a way which does not compromise the dog's welfare. Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) may be considered one tool for reducing dog barking but should be used sparingly and must always come with education to support the dog owner.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10342-013-0732-z>

<sup>2</sup> [ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/noise\\_from\\_human\\_activity\\_can\\_impair\\_foraging\\_in\\_bats\\_425na2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/noise_from_human_activity_can_impair_foraging_in_bats_425na2_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Blackwell, E., Casey, R., & Bradshaw, J. (2005). Firework Fears and Phobias in the Domestic Dog. Scientific Report for the RSPCA, University of Bristol, UK

Under proposal 6.5 RSPCA Cymru would recommend that these incidents are included in the Local Air Quality Management report and what plans are in place for the local authority to reduce the noise pollution affecting domestic dwellings across the local authority area.

**Bearing this uncertainty in mind, along with the information provided on the current state of play in Wales in sections 1 to 5 and Annex A of the consultation document, please tell us what further action, if any, you would like to see taken forward on air and noise pollution in the next five years?**

Following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, there is an opportunity to include domestic noise pollution into the Welsh Government's guidance over the next five years. The current EU Environmental Noise Directive focuses on transport, road, rail, air and industrial noise pollution but does not take into account domestic incidents.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Public Services Boards (PSBs) to improve the social and environmental well-being of the area they cover. RSPCA Cymru believes that a failure of residents to be responsible dog owners, can be detrimental to the social and environmental well-being of an area, with dog owners being demonised for a number of factors including dog faeces and uncontrolled barking.

Improving responsible dog ownership PSBs can meet two of the Well-being goals; a healthier Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities, as well as improving the welfare of dogs locally. Pet ownership improves the mental health of the owner and increases their physical activity and by increasing responsibility, areas can become more attractive with less dog faeces and decreased noise pollution from barking dogs as well as ending the divide between dog and non-dog owners.

The Review of Responsible Dog Ownership in Wales, submitted to the Welsh Government in March 2016, by RSPCA Cymru, Dogs Trust and Environmental Health Wales defined one aspect of responsible dog ownership as taking "reasonable steps to ensure that their dog's, and their own behaviour in respect of their dog, does not compromise the health, safety or wellbeing of other persons, animals and the community."<sup>4</sup>

### **If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed**

RSPCA Cymru would welcome the opportunity to consider other pollutants, such as sky or chinese lanterns and helium-balloons, that have an impact on pets and wildlife which can be affected through behavioural change. The Society, along with other organisations including farming unions, landowners and other animal welfare charities, have long campaigned for the outright ban on releasing sky lanterns. The Welsh Government, in July 2013, wrote to local authorities in Wales encouraging them to consider the risks posed by sky lanterns and helium-balloons.<sup>5</sup>

RSPCA Cymru have been encouraging members of the public to contact their local authority to introduce a voluntary ban of the release of sky lanterns from public land and venues, so far 15 of the 22 local authorities in Wales have put a ban in place. A recent case of a horse being burnt from the shoulders up to their face from a sky lantern have been reported. Another case of the dead barn owl is well documented, having starved to death. RSPCA Cymru would also like to see the Welsh Government lead on an end to mass helium-balloons releases which cause choking hazards to pets and wildlife, as they are released with no knowledge of where they will land and may be considered as littering.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Responsible-Dog-Ownership-Review-March-2016.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/previous-administration/2013/skylanterns/?lang=en>