

Livestock Worrying Consultation

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture

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Isle of Man
Government

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Overview

Livestock worrying, defined as a dog chasing, attacking, or behaving in a way likely to cause harm or distress to livestock, is an issue that affects both livestock keepers and dog owners. These incidents affect animal welfare, may lead to financial or economic losses and cause distress for all involved.

Farmers' organisations, including the Manx National Farmers' Union (MNFU) and the Isle of Man Flock Masters, have asked the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) to consider whether the Island's current legislation continues to provide adequate protection.

Other jurisdictions, most recently Scotland ([2021](#)) and England and Wales ([2025](#), coming into force in March 2026) have strengthened their livestock worrying laws. These updates include stronger penalties, enhanced police powers, broader definitions of livestock, new provisions for recovering costs, and clearer expectations for dog control. Their reforms prompt an important question for the Isle of Man: *does the Dogs Act 1990 still meet modern needs and expectations?*

This Consultation

This consultation seeks views on the principles and objectives that should guide any future approach to the review of livestock worrying laws on the Isle of Man. At this stage, we are not consulting on specific powers, penalties, or detailed legislative text. Instead, we are seeking evidence on whether the current law aligns with modern expectations, how the balance between livestock protection and responsible dog ownership should be struck, and the general level of tools and safeguards that would be appropriate should reform be taken forward.

In particular, we are interested in your views in relation to:

- How well the current legal framework is understood and whether it remains appropriate for today's expectations.
- The underlying purposes and objectives that any policy or legislation on livestock worrying should aim to achieve.
- How best to balance the interests of livestock keepers, dog owners, land managers and the wider public.
- The general principles that should guide decisions about enforcement, responsibility and proportionality.
- The role of education, awareness and reporting in preventing livestock worrying incidents.
- Whether there are areas where change may be worth exploring, or whether the current approach remains suitable.

Who Should Respond

The Isle of Man has a strong culture of responsible dog ownership, and our agricultural sector plays an essential role in supporting the Island's economy, landscape and environment. Views will help inform decisions about whether and how legislation may be strengthened to ensure that it is fair, proportionate, and effective for the Island.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important discussion.

Summary Of Current Law

Under Part IV of the [Dogs Act 1990](#):

- ‘Livestock worrying’¹ occurs where any dog is found straying, or not under control, on agricultural land and it is or has been worrying livestock on that land.
- The offence applies only on ‘agricultural land’².
- The maximum penalty is a fine of up to £5,000.
- Farmers have a legal defence to an action for damages for killing or injuring a dog caught attacking or worrying or about to worry livestock.
- Police may seize a dog only in specific circumstances and cannot obtain warrants specifically to enter and inspect domestic premises to seize dogs suspected to be involved in livestock worrying.

This consultation seeks views on whether these provisions remain adequate today.

Comparison with other Jurisdictions

The comparison below is provided for context only. Inclusion of these examples does not imply that similar changes are being considered for the Isle of Man.

Issue	Isle of Man (current)	Scotland (2021 Act)	England and Wales (2025)
Max penalty	£5,000 fine	£40,000 fine + 12 months’ imprisonment	Unlimited fine
Definitions of livestock	cattle (including: bulls, cows, bullocks, heifers or, calves) sheep goats pigs horses asses mules hinnies deer (not in the wild state) poultry (including turkeys, geese, ducks, guinea-fowl, pigeons, peacocks or quails (and, while in captivity, pheasants, partridges and grouse)).	Also includes expanded list (llamas, alpacas, deer, buffalo, enclosed game birds)	Also, expanded to include camelids (llamas, alpacas).

¹ Section 30 of the Dogs Act 1990 defines ‘worrying livestock’ as meaning “causing, or behaving in a way likely to cause, injury or suffering to livestock or, in the case of females, abortion or loss or diminution of their produce”.

² Section 30 of the Dogs Act 1990 defines ‘agricultural land’ as meaning “land used as arable, meadow or grazing land or for the purpose of poultry farming, pig farming, market gardens, allotments, nursery grounds or orchards.

Issue	Isle of Man (current)	Scotland (2021 Act)	England and Wales (2025)
Police seizure powers	Limited: dogs may be seized only when physically on agricultural land and caught worrying livestock; destruction only ordered in narrow circumstances (e.g., causing injury to a person in a public place or worrying livestock on agricultural land)	Police may seize, detain, enter land, and arrange vet examination / sampling.	Expanded powers: police may seize dogs on agricultural land, roads, or paths; detain until costs paid; dispose of dog after 7 days; keep formal registers, collect DNA evidence and have entry powers.
Land types covered	Law applies only when a dog is physically on agricultural land; not applicable if livestock strays off agricultural land (e.g., sheep escapes and is attacked elsewhere).	Agricultural land, but a dog is also considered 'worrying' if it is not on a lead or under close control in a field or enclosure where sheep are present (defined as being 'at large')	Agricultural land plus roads and paths.
DNA/vet evidence powers	None. The IoM Act does not provide for veterinary examination or DNA sampling powers for evidence gathering. Enforcement limitations are repeatedly highlighted.	Police may arrange vet examination and take samples/DNA.	Police may collect animal DNA evidence and enter premises.
Legal requirement for leads around livestock	None	A dog is considered to be 'worrying' if it is 'at large' around sheep. This includes if it is not on a lead or otherwise under close control.	Law penalises 'worrying' not being off lead per se.
Power for the Department to issue statutory guidance	None	Ministers may authorise enforcement bodies and associated guidance; Government has issued formal protocols.	No guidance-making provision in the Act; DEFRA communications are advisory only.

Consultation Questions

About you

1. Which option best describes your interest in responding to this consultation?

- Member of public
- Isle of Man Government
- Business owner or Stakeholder
- Member of Tynwald
- Other (please specify)

Other: _____

2. Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or industry?

- Yes, please state the organisation/industry below.
- No

Organisation/Industry: _____

Number of people or organisations represented: _____

3. Are you happy for us to contact you regarding your response if we need to?

- Yes
- No

If yes, then please add your name and contact email address below:

Name:

Email:

4. May we publish your response?

Please read our Privacy Policy for more details and your rights.

(An answer is required)

More Information:

- **Publish in full** – your organisation name, or the industry you represent, along with full answers will be published on the hub (your email will not be published)
- **Publish anonymously** – only your responses will be published on the hub (your organisation name, or the industry you represent, and email will not be published)
- **Do not publish** – nothing will be published publicly on the hub (your response will only be part of a larger summary response document)

- Yes, you can publish my response in full
- Yes, you may publish my response anonymously
- No, please do not publish my response

5. Are you an Isle of Man resident?

- Yes
- No

Consultation General Questions

The following questions explore people's views on the principles that should guide any future approach. They ***do not*** represent proposals, and no decisions have been made about whether legislative change is required.

6. Please confirm with which one of the below you most closely identify:

- Livestock owner
- Farm worker
- Vet
- Police officer
- Dog owner
- Former dog owner
- An animal charity
- Member of the public
- Other (please specify)

Other: _____

7. Please confirm if you have ever personally experienced a livestock worrying incident:

- No
- Yes – as a livestock owner
- Yes – as a dog owner

Section 1: Understanding the current position

8. I am concerned about the impact of livestock worrying on animal welfare.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

9. I am concerned about the financial impacts of livestock worrying on keepers.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

10. I am concerned about the emotional impacts of livestock worrying on keepers.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

11. I understand the existing law and what it requires of dog owners and livestock keepers.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional)

12. I believe current legislation is sufficient and does not need strengthening.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

13. I am concerned that any tightening of legislation may limit the ability for dogs to be properly exercised under their owner's control.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

Section 2: Purpose of any livestock worrying control

14. Which of the following should be the main objectives of any policy or legislation around livestock worrying?

(Tick all that apply)

- Preventing harm to livestock
- Protecting animal welfare
- Ensuring fairness for responsible dog owners
- Supporting farmers, land managers and rural livelihoods
- Promoting responsible dog ownership
- Enabling proportionate enforcement
- Encouraging education and awareness
- Other (please specify): _____

Comments (optional):

15. How should the law balance the interests of livestock keepers and responsible dog owners?

- The law should prioritise protecting livestock even if it increases responsibilities for dog owners.
- Responsible dog owners should not face additional restrictions due to the actions of a small number of irresponsible owners.
- Clearer rules and guidance for dog owners would be more effective than introducing stricter legal penalties.
- Livestock keepers and dog owners should share equal responsibility for preventing livestock-worrying incidents.
- Targeted rules such as seasonal or location-specific lead requirements—would achieve a fair balance between farming and dog-walking interests.

Comments (optional):

16. Thinking about how dogs should be managed around livestock, which of the following best reflects your view?

(Tick one option)

- Dogs should generally be required to be on a lead on agricultural land where livestock may be present.
- Lead requirements should apply only in specific situations (e.g. during lambing, in certain fields, or seasonally).
- Dogs should be under close control, but a lead should not be required by default.
- No additional control requirements are needed beyond the current law.
- Other (please specify): _____

Comments (optional):

Section 3: Penalties upon prosecution

17. What general principles should guide how penalties are structured?

(Tick all that apply)

- Proportionality
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Deterrence
- Flexibility (courts should have discretion)
- Predictability (clear rules and thresholds)

Comments (optional):

18. Do you believe the current maximum penalty of £5,000 is appropriate for the objectives of livestock worrying legislation?

- Yes, it is appropriate
- No, it is too low
- No, it is too high
- Unsure

Comments (optional)

19. If you believe the penalty should change, what general level do you think would be proportionate?

- A modest increase
- A significant increase
- A reduction
- Other (please specify): _____

Comments (optional):

20. What principles should guide how courts may respond to repeat or serious livestock worrying incidents?

- Courts should have access to behavioural restrictions³
- Courts should focus on fines
- Courts should emphasise education/training
- No additional tools are needed

Comments (optional):

³ this may include limitations on when and where a dog can be walked, specific control or dog management requirements such as leads or muzzles, training, or physical restraints.

21. What principles should guide how costs arising from enforcement action are allocated?

(Tick all that apply)

- Costs should be allocated in a way that is fair and proportionate.
- Individuals responsible for an incident should contribute to reasonable enforcement costs.
- Enforcement costs should be minimised for the public sector wherever possible.
- Any cost-recovery approach should be transparent and applied consistently.
- Costs should not be recovered from individuals, and enforcement should be publicly funded.

Comments (optional):

Section 4: Enforcement

22. What level of enforcement capability do you think is generally appropriate for dealing with livestock worrying?

- Basic enforcement only (e.g. responding after incidents)
- Moderate enforcement (e.g. some additional powers where necessary)
- Stronger enforcement capabilities
- No change required

Comments (optional)

23. What level of police seizure powers do you feel is appropriate in cases of suspected livestock worrying?

(Tick one option)

- Minimal powers—limited to situations where a dog is caught in the act.
- Moderate powers—allowing seizure where there is credible information that a dog may pose an ongoing risk.
- Stronger powers—allowing police to seize dogs where necessary to prevent harm or support an investigation.
- No change to current seizure powers.
- Other (please specify): _____

Comments (optional):

24. Thinking in general terms, what level of investigative powers do you believe is appropriate for dealing with livestock worrying incidents?

(Tick all that apply)

- Powers limited to responding to incidents already proven
- Powers that allow police to investigate incidents where there is credible information
- Powers that allow police to gather evidence from locations away from the incident site
- Powers that allow police to secure evidence to prevent repeat incidents
- No change to current investigative powers
- Other (please specify): _____

Comments (optional):

Section 5: Public Awareness and Reporting

25. The Isle of Man should place greater emphasis on public education around livestock.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

26. Any legislation should provide the power for the Government to issue statutory guidance.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Comments (optional):

27. Do you believe there is a need to explore changes to livestock worrying legislation?

- No change is needed
- Minor changes should be explored
- Significant changes should be explored
- Unsure

Comments (optional):

Next Steps

DEFA will analyse all responses and produce a summary of findings and a timeline for any reforms should they be indicated.