



At the national sheep worrying conference, there were calls to change Government legislation related to dog walkers. PICTURE:Theresa Eveson

Defra 'reluctant' to amend law on livestock attacks

► Calls for tougher stance on owners

By Olivia Midgley

DEFRA would be reluctant to introduce new legislation to make it illegal for walkers to let their dogs run among livestock.

A national sheep worrying conference heard there was a major disconnect between Government legislation and police forces' interpretation of it, meaning owners of dogs which had attacked livestock often went unpunished.

However, Tim Morris, who sits on Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Board for England, said the existing Dangerous Dogs Act could be interpreted to include livestock.

"The Government will be reluctant to make legislation," said Mr Morris.

"Could we not do more with the current legislation? The Government thinks the dangerous dogs legislation applies to livestock too."

'Close control'

National Sheep Association chief executive Phil Stocker blamed the fact 'close control' – as stated in the Countryside Code – was so open to interpretation.

Mr Stocker added: "I would like it to be illegal to not put your dog on a lead around livestock."

The inaugural conference, organised by SheepWatch UK, heard how a lack of training meant some police officers did not have a full understanding of the law surrounding attacks and how to secure a successful prosecution.

PC Dave Allen, of North Wales Police's rural crime team, suggested 'tweaking' the Dangerous Dogs Act to explicitly include livestock.

“**They must remember it is a business environment - it is our place of work**

CHARLES SERCOMBE

PC Allen, whose team deals with four to five attacks each week, said the lack of accurate statistics meant dog attacks had not been given the attention they deserved.

"The Home Office does not require police to record attacks so there is a major under reporting," said PC Allen.

"If we had this data we could do

some proper number crunching."

NFU livestock board chairman Charles Sercombe, who has seen a number of attacks on his own farm in Leicestershire, said the situation was so bad some affected farmers had considered quitting farming altogether.

"The industry drives people to despair and some farmers are seriously thinking about giving up," said Mr Sercombe, adding the introduction of new legislation could be a vital tool.

"Education is key in making people aware of their responsibilities and the damage their dog can do when it is off a lead.

"We want people to enjoy the countryside but to do so responsibly. They must remember it is a business environment – it is our place of work."

MORE INFORMATION

To find out where you stand if a dog attacks livestock on your farm, visit www.fginsight.com/dogattacklaw

Take the Lead signs

FARMERS Guardian continues to promote responsible dog ownership via its national Take the Lead campaign.

To request Take the Lead signs – sponsored by The Original Muck Boots Company – which warn dog owners to keep their pets on a lead around

livestock, send a self-addressed A4 envelope with at least three first class stamps to:

**FG Take the Lead,
Farmers Guardian,
Unit 4,
Fulwood Business Park,
Preston, Lancashire,
PR2 9NZ**