



**St Helena  
Government**

## Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio

# Pet Imports from South Africa

### Background:

A few years ago it was possible to import dogs and cats directly from South Africa, whereupon they underwent 6 months quarantine. The question of importing pets from South Africa has been considered and studied carefully and at length. Because of a number of significant factors, legislation<sup>1</sup> was amended in 2011 after public consultation to make South Africa and all other countries except the UK and Ascension not eligible for the direct importation of pets. Subsequent to this amendment St Helena will no longer provide a quarantine service for pets. It is, however, still possible to bring a pet to St Helena from virtually anywhere in the world. This paper explains the reasons behind this legislation, and how to import your pet.

### Reasons:

- There is an acknowledged international rise in the spread of animal diseases due to increased movements of animals and animal products – both legal and illegal;
- Direct importation from South Africa would have to apply to the whole nation, not just zones considered relatively disease free. SA has long, 'leaky' borders especially with the poorly disease-controlled nations of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and we cannot take a piecemeal approach to South Africa and the relevant legislation;
- The SA department of agriculture (DAFF) appears overstretched and we have had very limited responses to other initiatives. We cannot therefore rely on watertight services for any regulations that we may make to be handled at that end, which includes certification;
- Any imports would have to undergo an array of tests as St Helena is relatively 'clean' and at just 47 square miles has a small and sensitive ecosystem. It also has a number of important parasites which can act as disease vectors, imported from Africa in the past. This is combined with the perfect climate for incubating and propagating disease. Tests also apply to pet imports from the UK where we have DEFRA/APHA agreed certificates, officially appointed veterinarians (OVs), and accredited laboratories to do the work. SA does not have these standardised facilities to an acceptable degree;
- For the reasons above, SA certification cannot currently come up to our required standard;
- The old island system of 6 months quarantine has been abolished and is now deemed both impractical (cost and lack of personnel to operate; cost of maintaining modern quarantine facilities; poor value for money with limited budgets) and unacceptable (animal welfare and behavioural changes in dogs; owners breaching and negating quarantine because of ease and proximity);

- Legislation was therefore changed to utilise the better resourced services of our parent nation, the UK. Pets can come from anywhere in the world, but having (a) first satisfied UK requirements, and (b) secondly satisfied St Helena's requirements;
- From 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2012, the UK relaxed import requirements, so that SA pets can now avoid any quarantine using a 4 month protocol at home prior to travel. It was accepted that the price to pay is the arrival of some exotic diseases in the UK, a process that has already begun;
- As a result, disease sensitive nations such as Australia and New Zealand treat even the UK as 'dirty' – a potential source of contagious disease. Our UK DEFRA/APHA approved certificate is modelled on these nations as well as our requirements for the very same reasons. St Helena is NOT the UK, and as a small island nation, is sensitive to the incursion of any new disease into a susceptible population. This is a risk that the island neither wants to take, nor needs to take. However, diverting pets via the UK allows St Helena to have other tests performed in accredited laboratories and certificated by official veterinarians. It also creates the appropriate delay between rabies vaccination and arrival on the island (see below);
- The UK's rules combined with the time required to export a pet to St Helena still builds in an approximately 6 month period for imports from SA which will act as a form of quarantine. This is vital. Contrary to popular belief, rabies vaccination is neither a guarantee against infection, nor does it cure infection if it is already present. Rabies can take over 6 months to appear. The process of importing via the UK does not cause a delay: 6 months isolation in quarantine on St Helena has been swapped for 6 months preparation of which 4 months can be spent at home, with no quarantine on arrival in St Helena. It does however involve greater expense;
- While rabies is not our only concern, it is paramount. Worldwide, rabies still accounts for a staggering 59,000 human deaths per annum. We also test for a range of blood borne and arthropod transmitted diseases which would prosper here.
- It is also of interest to note that while one case of rabies in Europe is a major issue, South Africa is reporting 600 to 700 cases in wild and domestic animals per annum. This excludes undiagnosed cases. Whilst SA has a rabies vaccination programme, these figures illustrate the widespread uncontrolled nature of the disease on the continent and its potential threat.
- Whilst the UK can absorb the risk by virtue of the country's scale, surveillance facilities and response teams, St Helena cannot.
- A single rabies case in St Helena would drastically alter the island's international legal status voiding import/export certification arrangements with the UK and the EU, placing islanders at risk, resulting in a kill policy for exposed stock and pets, and setting back the embryonic tourism industry.

## Current protocol:

Under an obligation to align with the EU, DEFRA UK has publicised new pet import rules which came into effect 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. There is now no UK quarantine for pets from Third Countries as long as a specific protocol is followed. The protocol is currently, in order:

1. Implant microchip;
2. Vaccinate against rabies (if no microchip before this, then even if already vaccinated);
3. Blood test at least 30 days after vaccination;
4. Wait 3 calendar months from date of successful blood test;
5. Treat for tapeworm 1-5 days pre expected ARRIVAL time in UK;
6. Acquire official documentation from vet;
7. Import via official entry route (<https://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/approved-routes> )

**NOTE:** These are UK rules and the above if for guidance only. No responsibility can be taken by this authority for their accuracy. Up-to-date details should always be checked on the UK website (<https://www.gov.uk/bring-your-pet-to-uk> ).

Once the UK has been entered, the pet owner will need to apply for the St Helena certificate from DEFRA/APHA's Carlisle office ([www.gov.uk/apha](http://www.gov.uk/apha) [product.exports@apha.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:product.exports@apha.gsi.gov.uk)). St Helena is still free from many diseases, and further blood testing requirements take approximately 1 month. From vaccination in South Africa to landing the pet in St Helena, an owner can expect the whole process to take 5-6 months. To reach St Helena there is a monthly Ministry of Defence vessel sailing from Southampton with excellent on-board kenneling facilities. This vessel provides the link to the cargo ship MV *Helena* at Ascension, but schedules need to be consulted. The RAF Brize Norton flight will not take pets, only military and police dogs. It is also now possible to fly your pet to Cape Town International Airport for transfer to the MV *Helena*, but with extra conditions attached for transiting to the harbour.

## Going back to South Africa:

Direct return to South Africa using the cargo ship MV *Helena* is now possible.

THE DECISION TO REFUSE DIRECT IMPORTS OF PETS FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND OTHER NATIONS HAS BEEN BASED ON RISK ASSESSMENT AND SCIENCE, ***ONE WHICH IS DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF OUR ANIMALS AND PEOPLE.*** THIS IS THE OVERRIDING PRINCIPLE.

Further information can be obtained from the Senior Veterinary Officer [joe.hollins@sainthelena.gov.sh](mailto:joe.hollins@sainthelena.gov.sh) , tel: 00 290 24724.

---

<sup>1</sup> Animal (Diseases) Ordinance & Regulations, Cap. 96

Darren G Duncan  
Portfolio Director

September 2021