

PRIME MINISTER

DOGS

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Attached is an H Committee paper by the Environment Secretary about dog licences. The Public Accounts Committee reported last year on the licensing system and criticised severely the absurd position in which the cost of administering the system was greater than the revenue collected by some £3.5m. The Secretary of State sees four main options:-

i) To do nothing. But he thinks this is indefensible.

ii) Abolition. This would require primary legislation and a loss of such information as the licensing system now gives.

iii) A Dog's Bill covering the whole range of control issues. Unfortunately there is no consensus even within the Government side on the right solution.

iv) Increase the licence to £5. This would not require primary legislation, would remove the collection deficit and leave income over to assist local authorities to deal with problems caused by dogs. The Secretary of State proposes a half-rate concession for over 65's living alone.

A £5 licence fee would produce total income of £12.5m (there are more than 2½m dogs in the country) and the total income for local authorities would be about £8m. If licences were abolished there would be a saving of £4.5m on collection costs against a loss in income of about £1m.

As you know, these animal questions always cause disproportionate difficulty and there will be considerable abolitionist sentiment in the House. Moreover, some will argue that an increase in the licence fee will simply cause greater evasion in a country which is used to

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a minimal licence fee. The choice really does seem to be between abolition and a fee increase.

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13 July 1983

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You will recall seeing the H paper by the Secretary of State for the Environment on Dog Licences and disagreeing with his conclusion that the licence fee should be raised instead of abolished. H discusses the issues tomorrow (Tuesday). Would you like the Lord President to minute you on the conclusions of the Committee if H decides against abolition?

*Yes please  
no*

*H*

18 July, 1983