

# Filling the gaps: Companion animal law and practical application in Mongolia

## A local and international perspective

Anujin Lkhagvanyam

### **Abstract**

In January 2024, Mongolia's first ever comprehensive Law on Companion Animals came into force a milestone that represents decades of patchy policy-making and relentless public pressure for change.<sup>1</sup> This innovative legislation requires mandatory registration, microchipping, sterilisation, and vaccination of companion and working animals, and also includes important anti-cruelty and anti-culling clauses drawn from international principles based on global efforts to advance animal welfare.<sup>2</sup> However, this regulation is unevenly applied throughout the country: while cities are making encouraging headway, in rural areas culling is used as a short-term response to the problems caused by loose animal populations. In addition, animal shelters and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also point to the ongoing discrimination and systemic inadequacies that obstruct meaningful change.<sup>3</sup> This article employs a multidimensional method, weaving together doctrinal legal analysis, firsthand field research, official statistics from governmental and civil society actors, semi-structured interviews with domestic governmental officials and international organisations working on the ground in Mongolia, as well as comparative case studies across Europe and Asia to expose the complex relationship between legislative progress and on-the-ground realities. This article concludes with an examination of further systemic causes and conditions of sustained reform including the need for new forms of funding, improved coordination capacities, digitalisation, and civic education en masse.

### **I. Introduction**

The 2023 Law on Companion Animals is a landmark contribution and defines the animal welfare legal status in Mongolia. For many years, their status in law was set as little more than personal chattels, or even public menaces, where slaughter was the standard reaction to rising numbers of strays.<sup>4</sup> The arrival of this legislation driven by the mounting force of civil society, strong international advocacy, and state modernisation work marks a new era in which animals are recognised as matters worthy of right-holding, and the state embraces its role as governor according to standards that are both humane and scientifically informed.

The new law is sweeping in its reach: It requires the mandatory registration, microchipping and sterilisation of companion animals; sets up stringent breeder and shelter licensing regimes; and criminalises cruel practices cruelty, abandonment and non-medically necessary culling.<sup>5</sup> Dog registration rates were reportedly exceeding 60% as of mid-2024, and complaints to the city on stray dogs had decreased 48%.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, despite these commendable improvements, a number of issues remain. A plethora of evidence obtained from interviews and animal shelter documents indicates that implementation of the new legislation is patchy at best, in both districts and provinces.<sup>7</sup> The divide between urban and rural areas is even more stark: in regions like Khovd, districts such as Sukhbaatar, the budgets for animal health are shockingly minimal and veterinarians seldom access these provinces.<sup>8</sup> A deep cultural prejudice against sterility and for 'thorough-

1 Law on Companion Animals (Mongolia, 2023) ch 1, art 1.

2 ibid chs 2–4; Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW), proposed inter-governmental agreement, endorsed by numerous non-governmental and governmental organisations, see World Animal Protection, 'Back a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare' <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/> accessed 1

3 October 2025. 3 Interview by author, Davaadorj S, director at Dambadarjaa Shelter, Ulaanbaatar (26 July 2024); Ulaanbaatar Animal Welfare Office, '2024 Annual Shelter Report' (September 2024).

4 Parliament of Mongolia, 'Records: Law on Domestic Animals (1926)' (Ulaanbaatar: State Archive, 1926).

5 Law on Companion Animals (n 1) arts 5–24

6 Ulaanbaatar Mayor's Office, 'Pet Registration Update' (July 2024) 3; 'Stray Complaints Yearly Trend' (August 2024).

7 Interview by author, B. Norjmaa, manager, Lucky Paws (23 August 2024); Shelter volunteer field diary, Chingeltei District, 2024.

8 Arkhangai Veterinary Administration, 'Quarterly Report' (April 2024) 4 (referencing regional veterinary challenges); Interview by author, Ts. Munkhjargal, provincial soum officer, Dornod (14 July 2024).

breeds' still persists; over 75 per cent of dog adoptions from shelters in the capital city went to purebred or Karelian dogs, even with its animal shelter regularly operating well above capacity by 2024.<sup>9</sup> In soums throughout the provinces of Bayankhongor, Darkhan-Uul and Dornod, according to local officials, informal culling persists unchecked, with 'public health' and resource scarcity often invoked in defence of generational habits.<sup>10</sup> Less than a quarter of the 224 abandonment incidents reported in 2023 and 2024 resulted in formal investigations, and just thirteen cases led to prosecutions.<sup>11</sup>

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section II situates the recent legal and cultural changes in Mongolia surrounding animal protection as part of a broader history that has evolved from culling, religious taboos, Soviet-era public health priorities, to national debates over the past ten years. Section III provides new quantitative and qualitative data to assess the gulfs, law-to-practice, by means of multi-sourced analysis. Section IV provides a comparison of Mongolia's reform path against global standards. V then advances a set of structural evidence-based reform initiatives pertaining to integration, funding and public engagement as crucial elements of success. Last, in VI, the article concludes with an extensive examination of the legal and civic consequences flowing from these changes.

## II. Historical and Legal Context

### A. Tradition and the Legacy of Animal Control in Mongolia

Domestic animals (most notably dogs of the revered 'Bankhar' breed) were viewed as entirely praiseworthy for their known loyalty and serviceability, but explicit justifications for rights-supporting interactions with them were lacking.<sup>12</sup> The population control programme started in the 20th century, when urbanisation and migration to Ulaanbaatar (as well as other cities) resulted in a large population of street animals.

Orders for public health issued in the 1972 and 1992 favoured animal disease control over animal welfare and resulted in a policy regime based largely on city-funded culling activities that continued well

into the early post-socialist period.<sup>13</sup> Based on the data of the Ministry of Health, these campaigns resulted in the killing of approximately 80,000 dogs and cats from the capital city in 2014.<sup>14</sup> In the 2010s, animal culling had become increasingly contentious in practice, with advocacy groups, media members and students even going so far as to protest against it due to what were perceived as the inherent viciousness of such methods (alongside their ineffectiveness in dealing with an ever-growing issue of stray animals).<sup>15</sup> Public protests in 2019, alongside the global commitment to the Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW), created crucial acceleration around legislative momentum for real change.<sup>16</sup>

### B. The Rise of the Legal Reform Movement

Between 2021 and 2023, cross-sectoral engagement apparently gathered momentum: local animal protection groups were testifying on equal terms as foreign experts and advocates, according to the records of Parliament.<sup>17</sup> The Law on Companion Animals was eventually passed in an emergency meeting of the Parliament following several outbreaks and mounting public pressure for legislative change.

The following are the notable changes instituted by the new law:

Every pet to be registered and microchipped within 60 days of purchase or obtaining them, initially for this campaign.

A mandate for sterilising pets, with exceptions for health or licensing reasons.

A requirement to spend a portion of municipal health budgets on animal welfare programmes. Neglect, abandonment and cruelty must be criminalised both open and undeclared culling. A requirement for yearly public reporting and creation of a digital directory covering all licensed breeders, shelters and enforcement actions.

A specific role for educational establishments and community media in promoting animal wel-

<sup>9</sup> Ulaanbaatar Animal Welfare Office (n 3) 6.

<sup>10</sup> Interview by author, B. Myagmarsuren, Darkhan-Uul soum vet (29 May 2024); Telegram Group, 'Bayankhongor Animal Outreach Reports', 15 June 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs, 'Animal Welfare Enforcement Statistics 2023–2024' (September 2024) 18–21.

<sup>12</sup> Tsendayush Z, 'The "Bankhar" in Folklore and Law' in Batjargal G (ed), *Animals in Steppe Culture* (Ulaanbaatar: Nomadic Studies Press, 2016) 41–55.

<sup>13</sup> Ulaanbaatar City Public Health Ordinance 4/1992 (repealed 2023); D. Ganbat, 'Zoonoses and Stray Control: Historical Developments in Mongolia' (2021) 34 *Mong Public Health Bulletin* 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Health, 'Rabies and Animal Control Data 2012–17' (2018) 21.

<sup>15</sup> Davaa M, 'Culling and Crisis: Street Animal Policy, 2002–2013' (2019) *UB Daily* 74–77; Lucky Paws, 'Mobilisation Timeline' (2019).

<sup>16</sup> Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) (n 2); Bayasgalan B, 'Reforms in Mongolian Animal Law' (2023) 7 *Mong L J* 200.

<sup>17</sup> Parliament of Mongolia, 'Committee Records: Law on Companion Animals (2021–2023)' (Ulaanbaatar: State Archives, 2023) 9–16. 1



fare information, awareness and education.<sup>18</sup>

Even with this legal clarity in theory, many of Mongolia's soum-level governments still do not have the technical resources or trained staff to consistently police these laws, and reporting on offending animals can be hindered by community secrecy and data fragmentation.<sup>19</sup>

### **III. From Law to Action: Policing, Shelter Practice and the Realization of Policy**

#### **A. Registration, Microchipping and Municipal Deviation**

In contrast to legal requirements, the effectiveness of animal registration and microchipping has demonstrated astonishing differences which are determined largely by local circumstances. As of August 2024, the capital city of Ulaanbaatar proudly declared a remarkable count of over 52,300 registered dogs and cats – an amount which is almost three times above the benchmark number prior to the law taking effect. Nevertheless, this good trend is not homogeneous; at provincial district level, the owned animals compliance has reached a very

poor record of less than 18%.<sup>20</sup> Fieldwork carried out in the Khovd and Arkhangai provinces paints a worrying picture: for a total estimated population of 5,000 animals in the main soums (districts), fewer than 600 had completed successfully the registration process and only 179 had been microchipped during its first ten months following these initiatives introduction.<sup>21</sup>

Key informant interviews with municipal animal registration officers expose a number of challenges to innovation, such as crumbling digital infrastructure, linguistic barriers and widespread ignorance in the public. One officer commented, “They don't really know what the law is, outside of the city, and some are worried that it's going to hurt their animals.”<sup>22</sup> Rural veterinary practices, including those rural vet clinics that exist in small numbers, are largely oriented toward livestock interests, with companion animal interest driven voluntarily or seen as supplementary.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ulaanbaatar Animal Welfare Office, ‘2024 Pet Registration Data’ (Sept 2024) 4–7.

<sup>21</sup> Arkhangai Veterinary Administration, ‘Q2 Field Survey’ (June 2024) 2; Interview by author, G. Amartuvshin, Khovd District Officer (8 August 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Interview by author, S. Delger, Ulaanbaatar Pet Registry (17 July 2024).

<sup>23</sup> Interview by author, Ts. Munkhbayer, Arkhangai Province Vet (13 Aug 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Law on Companion Animals (n 1) chs 2–4.

<sup>19</sup> Interview by author, L. Dashdeleg, Sukhbaatar soum registrar (2 August 2024).

Assistance from non-government organizations (NGOs), some of whom receive grants from international partners like World Animal Protection, has enabled the Lucky Paws team to hold three "pop-up" registration drives every summer in Ulaanbaatar and Selenge.<sup>24</sup> In 2024, a more than one thousand animals were registered via these programs, but only 12% of the pets came from rural families, emphasizing the continued gap between urban and rural access.<sup>25</sup>

## B. Sterilization and Infrastructural Deficits

Sterilization, which is vital to humane animal population management, has recently made some impressive progress in the capital city with annual sterilization campaigns sponsored by the municipal government and several associated veterinary colleges, leading to 15,700 animals sterilized in 2024.<sup>26</sup> Although this is a major step forward, "the average Ulaanbaatar-based animal shelter is frighteningly over capacity (135%) and the amount of time an animal has to wait for surgery often exceeds two months when we are nearing our height".<sup>27</sup> These numbers on the ground reported by NGOs are consistently shocking – in areas of Mumbai (a comparative case demonstrating a global challenge in animal management), only one out of every ten animals brought to a shelter for care had been sterilized before they went through the shelter's door.<sup>28</sup>

Challenges are very much related to infrastructures. There are only three public veterinary clinics across the entire western region of Mongolia that have adequate facilities to carry out high-volume sterilizations. Field-based in-depth interviews have exposed that there is a high prevalence of equipment breakdowns, lack of necessary medications and intermittent shutdown due to funding shortfalls. In Bayan-Ulgii and Dornod aimags,<sup>29</sup> the longest recorded waiting period for female dog spay surgery of 21 weeks is nothing short of staggering; moreover, in some soums (counties), scattered reports of sterilization failures or mistakes have severely eroded public faith not only in the law but also ironically in NGOs who are responsible for its

enforcement.<sup>30</sup>

## C. Resources, Volunteers and Ongoing Provision of Services

Financing for projects directed on the improvement of animal well-being is constantly in a situation of instability. In 2023, an overwhelming 73% of municipal animal welfare financing in Ulaanbaatar came from ad hoc allocations or "emergency" funds, with annual programming very susceptible to fluctuation.<sup>31</sup> One well-known shelter director was quoted in 2024 as being worried: "Every fall we close half our dog pens because equally the city does not accept new grant applications past August; in winter, it is only foreign donors that keep us above water."<sup>32</sup> Interviews with volunteer caregivers suggest a worrisome burden of burnout among those caring for animals. The average shelter in Mongolia leans heavily on a labor force of five to fifteen paid staff and scores of shifting volunteers, most of whom are students, unemployed youths or retirees looking for fulfilling activity.<sup>33</sup>

In the soums there are very few formal animal shelters, and community-based animal care is frequently informal and largely driven by groups of housewives, retired teachers or school children. These community workers are often without access to formal veterinary support and have irregular training delivered by NGOs during the time when mobile clinics are in their respective areas.<sup>34</sup> Their resources are mostly limited to contributions and scrap food, and most cats and dogs are fed outside in the open where temperatures fluctuate widely and maintenance strategies are minimal.

## D. Law Enforcement, Cruelty Cases and the Reporting Culture

There are laws that outlaw abandonment, non-medical mutilation (such as tail docking or ear cropping), and unethical breeding practices. Legal protection for animals deserves to be strengthened so that pets do not suffer.<sup>35</sup> Yet the real levels of enforcement are astonishingly low. In an analysis of 241 reports from Ulaanbaatar in 2023, only 36 had been investigated beyond the initial intake, and only nine led to official warnings or prosecutions.<sup>36</sup>

24 Lucky Paws, 'NGO Annual Report: Outreach 2024' (2024) 8–12.

25 Ibid; author's field notes, Selenge Summer Drive (July 2024).

26 Ulaanbaatar Mayor's Office, 'Veterinary Impact Review' (Sept 2024) 10.

27 Interview by author, N. Soyol, director, Chingeltei District Shelter (29 July 2024).

28 NGO survey, 'Shelter Intake and Sterilization 2024' (Sept 2024) 3.

29 Bayankhongor Veterinary Administration, 'Capacity Assessment' (May 2024) 6.

30 Interview by author, D. Otgon, Bayan-Ulgii Clinic Lead (4 July 2024).

31 Ulaanbaatar City Assembly, 'Budget Allocation by Category 2023' (September 2024) 21.

32 Interview by author, D. Chimedragchaa, East Ulaanbaatar Shelter (12 July 2024).

33 Lucky Paws (n 24) 13–14.

34 Author's observations, Khovd and Dornod (July–August 2024).

35 Law on Companion Animals (n 1) ch 3, arts 27–29.

36 Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs (n 11) 23.

A police officer in the Chingeltei District was quoted as saying, "Our officers have good intentions but animal cruelty is not yet seen as a public order issue few know information protocols and for most cases, evidence is a witness statement or phone photo."<sup>37</sup>

Those who are called on to enforce the laws are also burdened by a public that seems loathe to report instances of animal cruelty. In 2024, a study by the Department of Sociology at the National University of Mongolia found that 47% of those who observed acts of animal cruelty had not reported these to law enforcement for reasons that included mistrust in law, fear of reprisal and social expectations not to interfere on such matters.<sup>38</sup> Shockingly, 8% of those who brought injured or abandoned animals to shelters were able to tell the presumed abuser's name.

However, a number of districts have run pilots to increase collaboration:

Songinokhairkhan and Sukhbaatar have successfully appointed specific animal welfare liaison officers, meaning that the case through-put has increased significantly.<sup>39</sup> Out of the 350 successful reports logged on the Bayangol District hotline between August and October 2024, just three per cent were officially submitted by men, highlighting a gender gap in reporting culture.<sup>40</sup>

#### **E. Adoption, Attitudes, and Change between Generations**

With the onset of the landmark legislation passed in 2023, adoption rates from registered shelters saw a great swell of 16% year-on-year in Ulaanbaatar, helped by campaigns like "Summer with a Shelter" and "Adopt, Don't Shop", which have transformed the conversations around animal adoption.<sup>41</sup> Still, the bias toward purebred and imported animals remains deeply ingrained: of 2,400 dogs adopted across the city in 2024, a stunning 1,700 were either pedigreed or "designer" mixes. In comparison, however, there were only 240 of the 980 adopted cats which were classed as mixed or non-pure breed.<sup>42</sup> Many interviewees frankly reported high "top-up fees" they had paid unofficially in order to

clinch certain prized breeds, such as huskies, spitzes, retrievers or the Scottish fold cat.<sup>43</sup>

The qualitative results highlight a marked trend toward younger Ulaanbaatar residents, particularly those who have been exposed to global NGO campaigns or have travelled abroad, in expressing a greater willingness to adopt mixed-breed and disabled/senior animals.<sup>44</sup> Respondents under 30 are also significantly more likely to endorse sterilization, registry and strict enforcement of anti-cruelty laws.

#### **IV. Comparative Reflection: International Experiences and the Way Forward in Mongolia**

##### **A. The Netherlands: Systematic Prevention and Animal Databases**

The Netherlands remains in the vanguard of nations to comprehensively work towards effective companion animal control, with some small urban areas reporting little-to-no stray animals by 2019.<sup>45</sup> This success is based on strong and coherent regulation which mandates that all pets must be microchipped and registered with the local authority, while national bodies require public annual reporting to include data on demographic composition, sterilization rates, and adoption numbers.<sup>46</sup> The system is carefully conceived to be tethered to a national digital pet registry, consolidating information from numerous sources, including vet clinics, animal shelters, municipal authorities and law enforcement agencies the precise infrastructure that Mongolia's recently adopted framework seeks to mirror.<sup>47</sup>

The Dutch set aside 2%-4% of local budgets to the explicit support of animal welfare developments.<sup>48</sup> The prevention of homeless animals is emphasized by several programs, including reduced-cost spaying and neutering, tax credits for adopters, and strict bans on the sale of animals anywhere but in licensed shelters. The ongoing political backing for these measures is complemented by yearly campaign weeks, during which educational programs are presented at schools and provided through national media.<sup>49</sup>

37 Interview by author, D. Sukhbaatar, Chingeltei Police (7 August 2024).

38 Sociology Dept, National University of Mongolia, 'Cruelty Witness Survey 2024' (2024) 8–9.

39 Ulaanbaatar Animal Welfare Office, 'Pilot Project Reports 2024' (September 2024) 10–15.

40 Bayangol District Hotline Logs (August–October 2024).

41 MAAPA, '2024 Summer with a Shelter Results' (September 2024).

42 Ulaanbaatar Animal Welfare Office (n 3) 16.

43 Interview by author, shelter volunteer, Bayangol (Sept 2024).

44 Sociology Dept (n 38) 13–15.

45 Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 'National Animal Welfare Review 2019' (May 2020) 3–13.

46 Dutch Animal Protection Act 2014, arts 2–11; Netherlands Pet Registry, 'Pet Registration and Adoption: Annual Report 2023' (2023).

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid 14.

49 Dutch Municipalities Association, 'Campaign Week in Animal Welfare' (2022) <https://dierenbescherming.nl/ac->



Importantly, the Dutch require a high degree of personal responsibility when it comes to pets: fines for abandoning or breeding animals illegally can be up to €3,500 and ill-treatment is punished both administratively and criminally.<sup>50</sup> Adoption rates indicate that in 2023 some two-thirds of all pets adopted were CrossBreed/Previously HomeEd, a figure Mongolia's largest urban districts have yet to continue reaching.<sup>51</sup>

## **B. Germany and Switzerland: Tight Control, Education, and Legal Status**

Germany's Animal Welfare Act requires the compulsory microchipping, licensing and annual veterinary checks of all pets.<sup>52</sup> This breeder licensing procedure brings an element of bureaucratic control that effectively forces out abusive or unlicensed breeding activity, and as such significantly practices squeeze out 'illegitimate' breeding from the market, which has significant implications for overbreeding and abandonment. In the Netherlands, just as in Germany, sterilization treatments

ceased 6 October 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Dutch Animal Protection Act (n 46) art 42; BLG 2019/2022/117.

<sup>51</sup> Netherlands Pet Registry (n 46) 18.

<sup>52</sup> German Animal Welfare Act 2006 (Rev 2017), §§1–5; German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 'Shelter and Enforcement Reports 2021–2023' (2024).

are subsidized by dozens of towns – not to mention the mandatory (for first-time adopters) tuition of owners which is compulsory at some Länder.<sup>53</sup> At present, animal legal status is most developed in Switzerland, where the Federal Animal Welfare Act includes provisions for court-appointed representation of animals who are victims in cases of abuse, besides forcing all pet owners to attend training programs and direct public funds to improving infrastructure at shelters.<sup>54</sup> As a result of these enlightened measures, animal protection organizations have the political and social authority to ensure that even older or mixed-breed animals are being consistently adopted.

## **C. Asia-Pacific: Step-by-step models and community-based solutions**

Thailand has also faced similar resource and sociocultural situation challenges to Mongolia and in 2023 the city-based reform program began operation in Bangkok. The law, which requires animals to be microchipped and breeders licensed, also taps into city budgets for mobile neuter-vaccination clinics and to support the civil society organizations

<sup>53</sup> Bundesrat, 'Owner Education Requirements' (2023) 7–9.

<sup>54</sup> Swiss Federal Animal Welfare Act 2005 (Rev 2016), arts 100–104.

that serve as enforcement partners.<sup>55</sup> Digital registration is still somewhat sporadic in other parts of the country than in the capital, but education programs such as those on television and social media have helped to reduce reports of abandonment and cruelty by over 60% in urban areas.<sup>56</sup>

Animal Birth Control in Bhutan is a strategic partnership between ministries, local veterinarians and foreign non-governmental organizations, implementing seasonal sterilization and rabies vaccination campaigns reaching down into even the most distant provinces.<sup>57</sup> Thimphu saw a dramatic reduction in the number of stray animals that was 72% during the period between 2015 and 2023. This success in the technical side was possible by using simple protocols, continuous follow-up and strong cooperation with local leaders and monks.<sup>58</sup> Even in wealthy Japan and South Korea, the tactics show how a combination of nation-wide curriculum, shelters that receive continuous funding and sensitive media representations can help change public opinion in 2022, for example, such campaigns helped increase by 60% adoptions of special-needs and senior animals.<sup>59</sup>

## D. Lessons for Mongolia

Five key pillars are emphasized by the Global Best Practices, which appear to demand more attention for Mongolia to have an effective platform for animal welfare: (1) establishing nationwide digital registration systems; (2) decentralized application of subsidized veterinary outreach services; (3) strong legal penalties enacted against violations; (4) continued promotion of humane education embraced by curriculum and public media alike and; (5) a formalized and well-funded public-private partnership-oriented institutional arrangement focusing on long-term financing programs as well as service delivery.<sup>60</sup>

The combination of registry systems, enforcement tools and municipal financing within the frameworks in the Netherlands and Germany provides a useful guide for Mongolia to translate statutory purpose into operational reality. Bhutan's aggressive ABC (Animal Birth Control), low cost/high coverage model is an example of what can be

achieved even in under populated and resource impoverished settings. The social and generational transition that we see in Japan and South Korea is not inevitable, nor is it one-way traffic; impetus for such transitions comes from the continued commitments of schools, media outlets, non-government organisations with significant appears by the state.<sup>61</sup>

In translating those lessons, the challenge for Mongolia now is not only and simply one of legal aspiration but rather the daunting task of connecting a robust legal framework with fit-for-purpose institutions and fiscal formulas – a generational civic culture that makes very ordinary citizens view these protected species as non-human beings which stand within us as an essential social basis in law.

## **V. An Agenda for Policy: The Gap Between Ambition and Practice in Mongolia's Law reform**

### **A. National Animal Database, Full Integration of Digital Systems and Universal Deployment**

A core element of any successful population control program is the implementation of a thorough digital animal database. Mongolia should take the lead to carry out a coordinated effort to develop an integrated digital enterprise platform under management of Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry that can be accessed by every municipal and soum offices in Mongolia with full integration capacity with existing shelter and veterinary database.<sup>62</sup>

This progressive database will provide real time tracking of animals, improve owner accountability, allow immediate loss and found notification and provide additional tools for the investigation of cruelty or abandonment cases. To start with, pilot projects in the towns- Ulaanbaatar and Darkhan will have to be installed followed by an extension from soum (rural districts) level, thanks to mobile registration clinics and chip implantation campaigns at a preferential rate.<sup>63</sup> Financial incentives for individual pet owners and local government authorities should be interwoven with the accuracy of reporting and active participation in the registry.

The good practices developed in the Netherlands and Germany where cities' funding eligibility depends on their compliance with the Cancer Regis-

<sup>55</sup> Bangkok City Council, 'Progress Report on Pet Law Enforcement' (March 2024).

<sup>56</sup> Thai Animal Welfare NGO, 'Digital Campaigns and Outreach Assessment' (2024).

<sup>57</sup> Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture, 'Animal Birth Control (ABC) Programme: Results 2015–23' (2024) 5–12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid 19.

<sup>59</sup> Japan Animal Welfare Association, 'National Campaigns Archive 2018–2023' (2023).

<sup>60</sup> Dutch Animal Protection Act (n 46); Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture (n 57).

<sup>61</sup> Japan Animal Welfare Association (n 59); South Korea Ministry of Environment, 'Shelter Funding Summary' (2023).

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry, 'Digital Registry Commission Proposal 2024' (Aug 2024) 5.

<sup>63</sup> Mongolian Veterinary Association, 'Mobile Clinics Pilot Evaluation' (Sept 2024) 12–15.

try can serve as a model at which we should look thoughtfully to adjust it reasonably for Mongolia's unique geographic and resource context.<sup>64</sup> Shelters and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should have privileged direct API access to the registry, as enforcement partners.

## **B. Low Cost Sterilization, Outreach and Rural Health Infrastructure**

For Mongolia, it is critical that we prioritize the expansion of high-volume, low-cost sterilization campaigns outside Ulaanbaatar by strategically utilizing mobile veterinary units and establishing pop-up rural clinics to create wider coverage.<sup>65</sup> The introduction of subsidies for at-risk soums, combined with partnership contracts with private veterinary clinics, could greatly improve coverage and accessibility. Experiences gained in Bhutan have shown that the regular seasonal sterilisation campaigns performed carefully planned before breeding dependent on both local culture and dog behaviour to break a sustainable reduction of the number of strays born.<sup>66</sup>

Further, a well-designed voucher programme targeting low-income families in priority provinces where pet owners could get free sterilisation, or service credit for sterilisation would also help expand access to these important services. A national sterilization and rabies vaccination week should be declared and widely promoted through both urban and rural media outlets, relayed by community leaders and school activities so that all the public is informed about this campaign.

Furthermore, it is essential that national level protocols and service requirements are standardized; and annual auditing (by both vet networks and published district-wide outcome data) used to drive transparency as well as public confidence in the system.

## **C. Enforcement: Resources, Mission, and Procedural Change**

In order for both criminal and administrative penalties to serve as effective deterrents, it is necessary that animal welfare enforcement become the focus of resources and provide clear procedures.<sup>67</sup> Individual neighbourhood police stations should be able to appoint specialist liaison officers trained in

compiling cases of crimes against animals, collecting evidence and ensuring procedural justice.

Local authorities should trial the creation of rapid response units, integrated with police, shelter personnel and vets, aimed at responding to mass abandonment events, cruelty incidents or unlawful culling. Information on such incidents must be centrally recorded and publicly available, as is standard procedure in the Netherlands and South Korea with quarterly bulletins and annual statistics that are invaluable brushes for both accountability and advocacy.<sup>68</sup>

There should be no doubt that the penalties for abandoning or being cruel to your animals need cleaning up: fines should be graduated, offenders formally warned (in writing) on first offenses, then turned over for prosecution upon subsequent convictions.

## **D. Education, Attitude Change, and Media Collaboration**

Changing people's minds and social values is every bit as important as changing laws. Long-term comprehensive educational campaigns on multiple channels be institutionalized as a permanent policy with strong support from the Ministry of Education and partnering NGOs coalitions. Educational Contents that are added in the curriculum of basic education should effectively communicate Responsible Pet Ownership, Humane Treatment and debunking Myths about mongrels.

Moreover, documentaries, social media programmes and influencer-led strategies – such as those that have worked to increase use in Japan would need the content adapted carefully for it to work within Mongolia's language and cultural context.<sup>69</sup>

Time to Adopt: Our local schools, city hall and religious leaders can work together to host annual "Adopt, Don't Shop" fairs that incentivize the adoption of mixed-breed and senior animals. Media institutions need to take a view of animal welfare that considers it an ongoing civic issue, and not just an occasionally broached niche-interest concern.

## **E. Sustainable financing and public-private connections**

<sup>68</sup> Dutch Municipalities Association (n 49); South Korea Ministry of Environment (n 61).

<sup>69</sup> Japan Animal Welfare Association (n 59).

<sup>64</sup> Dutch Animal Protection Act (n 46); German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (n 52).

<sup>65</sup> Bangkok City Council (n 55); Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture (n 57).

<sup>66</sup> Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture (n 57) 17.

<sup>67</sup> Law on Companion Animals (n 1) ch 3, arts 24–29; Interview by author, D. Sukhbaatar, Chingeltei Police (n 37).



Units should demand a minimum percentage to be determined from local and national budgets for care of the pets, provided this percentage could be indexed according to number of districts in each area and number of microchipped animals established by law, such as sterilization services and shelters.<sup>70</sup>

Consider arrangements for NGOs and animal shelters to have formal representation on district animal welfare boards, with voting rights about budget allocation and access to government tendering processes for large outreach initiatives.

A National Animal Welfare Fund could, in the tradition of partnership models demonstrated effectively by Thailand's city-level programs and Bhutan's fund for ABC, potentially access a spread of public, donor and private funding streams.<sup>71</sup> The results of this fund must be independently audited and published clearly each year.

## F. Monitoring, Evaluation and Adaptive Reform

The Open data philosophy is one of the pillars upon

<sup>70</sup> Ulaanbaatar City Assembly, 'Annual Budget Statement 2024' (September 2024) 23–25.

<sup>71</sup> Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture (n 57); Thai Animal Welfare NGO (n 56).

which a modern government operates. Mongolia should undertake the creation of an annual "State of Animal Welfare" report, detailing with precision registry numbers, sterilization rates, enforcement measures, adoption numbers and qualitative surveys about public opinions about dissatisfaction.<sup>72</sup> And finally there should be public facing dashboards that can allow for open and anonymized review of shelter capacity, waiting lists to get into shelter, how quickly complaints get handled and how often they are rising to the level of criminal prosecution.

To embed adaptive processes at every level of administration, this learning needs to be established through systematic stakeholder meetings, user feedback forms and public roundtables so that practices can continually improve based on evidence of what actually works in practice.

## **VI. Conclusion: The Nexus of Law, Governance and Civic Values**

The passage of Mongolia's Law on Companion Animals in 2023 is an expression not just of a legal milestone, but rather an overdue reckoning with the complex weave that is its civic identity, legislating ability, and lived realities among varied urbanites

<sup>72</sup> Law on Companion Animals (n 1) ch 4, arts 33–38.

and rural residents.<sup>73</sup> A detailed reflection on experiences past, legal drafting subtleties, comparative examples and first-hand grassroots field work evidence opens the key intuition that a statutory leap forward – however ambitious it might appear to be – all alone is simply not fit enough to match the multiple social, economic and ethical forces at stake that impact outcomes in animal welfare.

The prehistory of Institutional Reform: The past decade preceding this climactic reform is characterised by a sharp disjuncture: in the official corridors, regardless of how mediatic or acerbic (in terms of culling), we have seen very little elimination – only to continue with that language, characterized through public health lingo -decades old; but even as NGOs were persistently active and youth mobilized energetically along synergistic global partnerships, significant signing up was sought both in the public mind-set and at top policy levels.<sup>74</sup> New legislation is very modern in its overt commitment to animal sentience, mandatory registration and community enforcement but continues to struggle with implementation for much of the country outside the capital city Ulaanbaatar.<sup>75</sup>

This article's in-depth empirical investigation carefully documents four particularly telling findings: (1) In the urban settings, impressive gains for registration, sterilization, and educational campaigns have been realized in part through effective inter-municipal collaboration and through strong networks of NGOs;<sup>76</sup> (2) Throughout the rural soums, a persistent lack of financial resources combined with inadequate technological infrastructure and deeply hallowed cultural attitudes continue to impede law enforcement and the development of sustainable, humane management systems;<sup>77</sup> (3) The structures for law enforcement, prosecutorial clarity and judicial follow-through are significantly underdeveloped as manifested in the notably low arrest rates or rates of conviction in cases related to animal abuse;<sup>78</sup> (4) Successfully reorienting society toward certain types of non-breed pure breeds or stray or special-needs animals requires not just new laws or policies but a long-term civic commitment to cultivating empathy toward those creatures through enhanced education and

open-sourcing social innovation.<sup>79</sup>

International standards confirm that the “hardware” of legal reform (laws, registry systems, police mandates and funding streams) must work in tandem with the “software”: partnerships, education programs and changes to cultural norms.<sup>80</sup> Extending animals' legal subjecthood is a precondition for their protection, but the efforts that continue to be made in rescue, care, and mutual assistance require governance structures that are flexible enough to respond to emerging insights and challenges with sufficient funding.

As we move forward, Mongolia's reformers, politicians, and civil society leaders must not only be ambitious but sustained in financial and technical investment—particularly for outreach in rural communities—digital supervision (including shelter infrastructure), data-driven planning and evaluation plans with a downturned angle to focus on the value of public-private partnerships and that promote community-based interventions that challenge harmful social norms while incorporating lessons stipulating empathy, kindnesses and civic-mindedness as part of the official curriculum at schools and our media platforms.

The potential behind the 2023 Law on Companion Animals goes beyond a simple “crackdown” on cases of cruelty or reduction in quantities of stray animals; it obviates an aspiration towards taking charge and embracing a more inclusive format of civic ethics as our social contract enters into a new stage wherein affiliation becomes key. As Mongolia crafts this innovative social compact with its non-human citizens, it offers a tantalizing template for other nations trying to wrestle the complex crucible of law, public medicine and ethical pluralism.<sup>81</sup> Achieving that ambitious vision will require both the courage to thoughtfully simulate global lessons and deep listening to local articulations of experience, as well as investment in the slow, frequently unspectacular labour of building trust in institutions and caring for the social world.

Prospective studies should closely follow the consequences of registry deployment, carefully review longitudinal shelter outcomes and underlie the impact of innovative teaching interventions on youth attitudes. It is in this journey from legislative

73 Parliament of Mongolia, 'Records of the Working Group for Drafting the Law on Companion Animals' (n 17); Law on Companion Animals (n 1).

74 Lucky Paws (n 24); Davaa M (n 15).

75 Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) (n 2); Bayasgalan B (n 16).

76 Ulaanbaatar Mayor's Office (n 6); Lucky Paws (n 24).

77 Arkhangai Veterinary Administration (n 8); Interview by author, S. Serdamba, Tuv Province, (6 July 2024).

78 Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs (n 11) 18; Sociology Dept, National University of Mongolia (n 38) 8.

79 Sociology Dept (n 38); Interview by author, Bayanzurkh Shelter (n 14).

80 Dutch Animal Protection Act (n 46); Japan Animal Welfare Association (n 59); Bhutan Ministry of Agriculture (n 57).

81 Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) (n 2); Parliament of Mongolia, 'Committee Records: Law on Companion Animals (2021–2023)' (n 17) 15.

promise to on-the-ground reality that civil society, including international partners – NGOs and veterinary organizations, and donor agencies – shall all have a vital role to play as Mongolia embarks upon the road ahead.

### **Author Biography**

Anujin Lkhagvanyam is a Master's student in Public Law at the National University of Mongolia. Her academic focus lies at the intersection of public law, comparative constitutional studies, and the emerging discipline of animal law within transitional legal systems.

Beyond academia, Anujin has long been dedicated to animal welfare on a community level. She has independently organized fundraising efforts, collected donations, provided food for stray animals, and assisted with veterinary expenses for abandoned and injured pets. She has also supported local NGOs with financial and material contributions. Motivated by witnessing firsthand issues of neglect, abandonment, and superstition-driven attitudes toward animals, Anujin is committed to advancing both legal reform and public awareness. Her current research emphasizes a comparative approach, analyzing international animal welfare frameworks alongside Mongolia's evolving laws. This article represents her first formal scholarly publication, directly inspired by her lifelong experience as a guardian of companion animals.

Looking ahead, Anujin aims to contribute to the development of stronger animal welfare legislation in Mongolia while creating scholarly bridges between Mongolian legal studies and global debates in animal law. She has shared her life with companion animals for more than 26 years and is currently a pet parent to a red-eared turtle, two Shetland Sheepdogs, and three Bengal cats.