



HOUSE OF COMMONS RESEARCH

Summary

In short, I have not identified a single stand-alone act or regulation that explicitly states that pets are prohibited from the cabin of aircraft on GB bound flights. Instead, the current position appears to be produced by a combination of:

- The pet travel legislation governing non-commercial movements of pet animals into Great Britain (principally the Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011);
- Government guidance, Bringing your pet dog, cat or ferret to Great Britain stating a restriction on pets (other than assistance dogs) travelling in aircraft cabins; and
- The administrative/operational conditions under which pets are checked on arrival at Great Britain airports. In a response to petition to Parliament the government has said that the rules are in place to facilitate biosecurity pet checking at facilities that are separate to the passenger terminals.

Scottish and UK Government division of responsibilities

The matter appears to cover both reserved and devolved areas in Scotland. In Scotland, air transport regulation is reserved by Schedule 5, E4 of the Scotland Act 1998, but the animal health / pet movement regime includes devolved Scottish Ministerial functions under the Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011.

The regulatory framework

The main domestic regulation on pet travel is the Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011, which extends to Great Britain and was made under the Animal Health Act 1981 and (at the time) EU powers. It sits alongside the UK assimilated law version of Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 on the non-commercial movement of pet animals, which lays down the animal-health conditions and compliance checks for pet movements.

The 2011 Order requires a carrier moving a pet animal into Great Britain to be approved by the appropriate authority (defined in section 2(1) as the Secretary of State in relation to England, Scottish Ministers in relation to Scotland, and Welsh Ministers in relation to Wales), subject to exceptions including a recognised assistance dog on certain air routes. It also allows approval to be made subject to conditions ensuring that pets are checked for compliance with the pet travel rules. Section 11(4) of this order states that Approval may be granted subject to such terms and conditions as the authority considers necessary or expedient to ensure that pet animals are checked by or on behalf of the carrier for compliance with the Pets Regulation. The pets regulation is defined as being Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 on the non-commercial movement of pet animals which sets out health requirements and checks for specific animals and how this must be documented.

The UK Governments guidance, Bringing your pet dog, cat or ferret to Great Britain summarises the rules on health checks and documentation and states that:



“you can only use certain travel routes and companies to enter Great Britain”

“Pets have to travel as cargo on a plane unless: you’re flying on a chartered private plane; [or] you’re travelling with a guide or assistance dog.”

Reasons for the restrictions

In May 2026 the UK Government responded to a petition to Parliament titled Allow small pets to travel in the cabin on flights entering the UK. The government said that the restriction was in place to facilitate biosecurity pet checking at facilities that are separate to the passenger terminals. The Government also said as follows.

*“The Government takes the importation of pets seriously and is committed to preserving high standards of biosecurity and animal welfare. We understand that many pet owners would like to travel with their pets in the aircraft cabin to Great Britain (GB). However, this needs to be balanced against our biosecurity requirements and **the operational complexities of conducting various border controls at airports.***

All pets (cats, dogs and ferrets) travelling into GB must be checked for compliance with the necessary health and documentary requirements prior to entry. This includes checking that the relevant rabies vaccination and tapeworm treatment requirements have been met. Rabies is a lethal disease in unvaccinated people and animals. GB is rabies free due to our high standards of biosecurity, and it is very much in the interests of humans and animals here that we protect our disease-free status and therefore the population.

***Current operational arrangements at GB airports mean that most pets must travel in the hold to ensure that these checks are carried out.** To facilitate these checks, all pets entering airports in GB must be transported safely and securely to the pet checking facility which is separate to the passenger terminals. Operations at airports are sensitive and complex, and other vital border controls must be considered as part of their operational processes.*

In practice, this means that most pets are required to travel to GB by air as manifest cargo. This enables the pets to be transferred directly to the pet checking facility and not through the main airport terminal. This approach ensures that a documentary record of the pets arrival is available to customs and other border control officials.”

The petition closes on 2 August 2026 and has received over 19,000 signatures to date.

Devolved and reserved matters

In short, the matter would appear to have both devolved and reserved elements.

Under section 29 of the Scotland Act 1998, a provision of an act of the Scottish Parliament is outside competence if it relates to reserved matters; schedule 5 defines what those reserved matters are. Schedule 5, Part II, E4 (Air transport), reserves Regulation of



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aviation and air transport. Schedule 5, Part II, E4 is relevant because it reserves the regulation of aviation and air transport, including carriage by air, civil aviation, aviation security and airports.

The Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011 indicates a devolved element too by giving the appropriate authority (which includes Scottish Ministers) the function of approving carriers that move pet animals into Great Britain and of attaching conditions to approvals to secure compliance checks. This is also reflected in schedule 5, part II, C5 of the Scotland Act which provides an exception to reservation for import and export control for:

“Prohibition and regulation of movement into and out of Scotland of

- 1. food, animals, animal products, plants and plant products for the purposes of protecting human, animal or plant health, animal welfare or the environment.”*

The Scottish Government does not appear to have directly commented on the issue of allowing pets in aircraft cabins.