



Dog and cat protection law in England, South Korea and recommendations for Vietnam

Nguyen Thao Nguyen, Bui Minh Phuong

Faculty of Economic Law, Hanoi Law University, Vietnam

Abstract

In the global scope of increasing attention and advancement of animal welfare, the Government of England and South Korea is continuously refining the legal framework for protecting dogs and cats, with a view to ensuring humane treatment and safeguarding the fundamental rights of companion animals under human care. This article examines and analyzes England and South Korean legal provisions concerning dog and cat abuse, abandonment and theft, as well as the current situation of trading, slaughtering, and consuming dog and cat meat. On this basis, it proposes certain orientations and solutions aimed at improving and enhancing the implementation of laws on protecting dogs and cats in Vietnam.

Keywords: Dog and cat protection, animal welfare, dog and cat abuse, abandonment and theft, dog and cat meat consumption

Introduction

Countries around the world, including England, South Korea, and Vietnam, increasingly regard dogs and cats as companion animals and important family members. Through long-term domestication and selective breeding, dogs and cats have largely lost their ability to survive independently in the wild and have become significantly dependent on human care. Therefore, placing these animals under special legal protection is an inevitable requirement to safeguard their welfare^[1].

Dog and cat Protection Law consists of legal provisions regulating social relations arising in the processes of keeping, caring, and managing dogs and cats, with the aim of the interests and health of these animals in accordance with humane norms and animal welfare standards. These legal regulations are not intended to empower dogs and cats, but rather to ensure they have the ability to protect themselves from actions that infringe upon their health, living environment, and basic development^[2].

The role of Dog and cat Protection Law includes: (i) Establishing an effective, coherent, and transparent legal framework for the protection of dogs and cats through the formulation of standards of conduct, enforcement mechanisms, and coercive measures for handling violations; (ii) Raising public awareness and legal consciousness regarding the protection of dogs and cats. Law serves as a tool to reinforce ethical norms, with educational and deterrent effects, gradually eliminating practices contrary to social standards - such as stealing dogs and cats for consumption and contributing to the development of a civilized society; (iii) Ensuring public safety in relation to dog and cat ownership through legal regulations on care, management, and humane treatment. Accordingly, if pet owners discover that their dogs or cats have been stolen or unlawfully captured, they are entitled to legal protection.

Experience of England and South Korea in the dog and cat protection law

1. Regulations on the dog and cat abusement

Each country defines animal abuse differently; however, within the scope of this study, animal abuse is understood as intentional acts causing harm or unnecessary suffering, including beating, mistreatment, injury, or killing dogs and

cats. Such acts are strictly prohibited and severely sanctioned in both England and South Korea.

In England, a person commits an offence if he engages in an act or omission which he knows, or ought reasonably to know, will cause unnecessary suffering to a dog or cat^[3]. In determining whether an act constitutes an offence, competent authorities consider factors including: (1) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced; (2) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment; (3) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was for a legitimate purpose; (4) whether the suffering was proportionate to the purpose of the conduct concerned; (5) whether the conduct concerned was in all the circumstances that of a reasonably competent and humane person.

In South Korea, although there remains some overlap and lack of clarity between the definition of “animal abuse” and the concept of “abused animals”, legislators have prohibited all acts that inflict bodily harm or unnecessary suffering on dogs and cats without legitimate justification or necessity, including in situations not required for preventing harm or imminent danger. Such prohibited acts include physical abuse conducted for purposes such as gambling, advertising, entertainment (excluding traditional folk games), or unjustified self-defense.

2. Regulations on the dog and cat abandonment

In essence, the dog and cat abandonment reflects a denial of the responsibility to care for and nurture companion animals, for various reasons such as financial burden, inability to afford veterinary treatment, or dissatisfaction caused by noise or behavior of pets. Regardless of the reason, abandonment significantly affects animal welfare and contributes to broader social challenges, including the growing burden on public authorities and animal rescue organizations. Accordingly, both England and South Korea prohibit dog and cat abandonment, although each adopts a different regulatory approach.

In England, abandonment is regulated through the duties and responsibilities of pet owners under Animal Welfare Act 2006, Article 9. According to that, a person commits an

offence if he does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice, such as a suitable environment, suitable diet, ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns, protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

In South Korea, the law defines “abandoned animals” as animals left in public places such as streets, parks, or other public areas ^[4]. However, this definition remains insufficiently comprehensive, as it does not fully cover situations where owners leave animals at rescue organizations or abandon them in former residences after relocation.

3. Regulations on the dog and cat theft

In England, any individual who takes or detains a dog, or takes a cat from the lawful control of its owner or lawful keeper, commits the offence of pet theft ^[5]. The enactment of a separate Pet Theft Act, independent from the Animal Welfare Act, emphasizes the special status and social value of companion animals and underscores the need for strict legal sanctions. However, this Act provides certain exceptions to criminal liability, such as when the accused can demonstrate a legitimate reason for taking or detaining the animal, or reasonably believes that animal is lost and has fulfilled reporting obligations to facilitate proper violations in practice ^[6].

In South Korea, dog and cat theft is regulated as a form of animal abuse. The law prohibits the capture, sale, or killing of dogs and cats, as well as capturing animals for such purposes, including stray or abandoned animals or animals whose owners cannot be identified ^[7]. Nevertheless, the law primarily targets acts intended for commercial trade or slaughter, leaving legal loopholes for other forms of unlawful capture, such as detaining dogs, cats for private use, entertainment, or advertising for profit.

Overall, both England and South Korea have adopted specific regulations addressing dog and cat theft, thereby distinguishing companion animals from ordinary property.

4. Regulations on the dog and cat meat trade, slaughter and consumption

In England, although there is no explicit prohibition on the dog and cat meat trade, slaughter and consumption, largely due to the absence of cultural demand. These activities are effectively unlawful under Article 4 of the Novel Foods Regulation 2018 (England), as dogs and cats are not included in the European Union’s list of approved novel foods ^[8]. While this issue does not frequently arise in practice, proposals for an explicit statutory ban have received strong support from animal welfare organizations and policymakers ^[9].

In South Korea, dog meat consumption is a long-standing tradition, existing as a unique cultural aspect for the people, and is more commonly consumed and preferred than cat meat. However, in early 2024, a special act ending the breeding, slaughter, and distribution of dogs for food was passed with the aim of contributing to the realization of animal welfare values and promoting respect for life and harmonious coexistence between humans and animals. From 2027 onwards, all activities related to breeding, raising, slaughtering, or distributing dogs or dog meat for human consumption will be prohibited ^[10]. Thus, the South Korean government has been very flexible, not rigidly applying this

ban abruptly, but setting a three-year timeframe from the date of enactment to allow people to gradually change their behavior, thereby ensuring the law is effectively implemented in practice.

Besides, the South Korean government adopted a transitional approach, allowing a three-year grace period to facilitate gradual behavioral change and effective implementation. The government also provides financial and logistical support for business closures and occupational transitions, including compensation for remaining assets, relocation costs, vocational training, and job placement assistance ^[11].

In summary, both England and South Korean laws have some regulations governing this behavior. Despite these advances, regulatory gaps remain incomplete regarding the trade, slaughter, and consumption of dog and cat meat within their respective countries. While England relies primarily on food safety regulations rather than explicit prohibitions, South Korea has banned dog meat entirely, the prohibition does not extend to cat meat. The shift in South Korean law has received much support from animal lovers in that country and all around the world, as social consensus acts as political pressure, although not all members of society share the same ethical views on animal use ^[12]. On the other hand, some argue against the law, claiming that banning the dog meat trade infringes on individual freedoms, as the law cannot prohibit citizens from choosing the food they consume, moreover banning act affects the livelihoods of business owners ^[13].

5. Sanctions for Violations

In England, penalties for violations of causing unnecessary suffering and neglecting the responsibility to care for animals under one's care (animal abandonment), and violations related to the capture and possession of dogs and cats, include imprisonment and administrative fines ^[14]. Accordingly, individuals who violate these regulations may face a maximum prison sentence of 5 years and/or a fine of up to £5,000 ^[15]. In addition, they may also face other supplementary penalties such as revocation of animal ownership rights or a temporary ban on owning or caring for animals ^[16]. To enable the authorities to detect, control, and promptly address violations related to abandonment or theft of dogs and cats, pet owners are obligated to attach identification devices (Microchips) to their pets ^[17].

In South Korea, the National Assembly has enacted strict measures to address violations related to the abuse, abandonment, theft, and trafficking, slaughter, and consumption of dog and cat meat. These measures include compensation for damages, fines of up to 30 million won, and imprisonment for up to three years ^[18]. In particular, abandoning dangerous or aggressive dog breeds judged by the Mayor will be subject to harsher penalties than other breeds due to the potentially serious harm caused by abandoned animals; therefore, offenders will face greater legal consequences ^[19].

For acts of abuse that cause serious consequences, such as killing dogs and cats, these countries apply harsher penalties than for ordinary abuse that does not seriously harm the health or life of pets. It is evident that the England and South Korean governments have taken strong action against violations in the protection of dogs and cats, including civil, criminal, and administrative sanctions. This demonstrates the deterrent and punitive nature of the law, thereby

reinforcing the humane and civilized views and ideas of the nation regarding the protection of animals in general and companion animals in particular.

Current situation of Dog and Cat Protection Law in Vietnam

Regarding dog and cat abuse, Vietnamese law has initially recognized the principle of humane treatment of animals and penalized acts of beating and torturing them. However, the scope of regulation is still narrow, mainly applying to those involved in animal husbandry, while acts of mistreatment committed by the third parties are not fully regulated. Furthermore, the penalty provisions only regulate beating and torturing in general (fines ranging from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 VND) ^[20] without specifying the level of violation corresponding to the degree of injury or pain suffered by the animal, because in reality, each act of mistreatment will have different consequences.

Regarding dog and cat abandonment, although there is no direct prohibition of abandonment, Vietnamese law imposes certain mandatory obligations on pet owners, demonstrating their responsibility in the care and management of their pets. Furthermore, owners need to manage their dogs and cats to prevent them from attacking or endangering the community and society ^[21]. Therefore, if their dogs or cats cause damage, the owners will be held responsible for compensation. However, this regulation has a legal loophole, allowing abandonment without consequences, particularly where no harm to third parties occurs. Specifically, in cases where sick, elderly, or injured dogs and cats are abandoned in public places or garbage dumps without causing or being able to cause damage, the owners will not be held responsible, even though the health and safety of the pets have been compromised.

Regarding dog and cat theft, in Vietnam, dogs and cats are legally classified as property ^[22]; therefore, the act of dog and cat theft is addressed under general property theft provisions. Depending on the value of the stolen property, the applicable penalties will vary ^[23]. The limitation of quantifying the material value of pets through market price is the disproportionate relationship between the actual value of the pets and the special values they bring ^[24]. Therefore, the law needs to be adjusted promptly to regulate the elements constituting violations, thereby fairly handling violations related to the dog and cat theft, as these are special assets with significant emotional and meaningful value to their owners.

Regarding the trade, slaughter, and consumption of dog and cat meat, currently, those animals are on the list of terrestrial animals requiring quarantine during transportation; however, they are not prohibited food items and are not subject to slaughter control regulations under the law ^[25]. Laws regulate violations related to the transportation, slaughter, and trade of dogs and cats for food primarily through administrative and criminal sanctions, such as penalties for violations of quarantine certificates issued outside the provincial area, violations regarding transportation vehicles, animal products, and animals that do not meet veterinary hygiene requirements, along with supplementary penalties (confiscation of quarantine certificates or mandatory re-quarantine, etc) ^[26]. In cases of spreading infectious diseases that endanger humans and animals, violators commit crimes under Articles 240 and 241 of the Penal Code 2015, amended in 2025. Furthermore,

since the supply for this trade, slaughter, and consumption of food often comes from the capture or theft of dogs and cats from the public, Article 323 of the Penal Code 2015, amended in 2025, concerning the crime of harboring or consuming property obtained through another person's crime, may also be applied. Recognizing that the lack of regulations classifying dogs and cats as animals subject to slaughter control in a society with a strong tradition and culture of consuming dog and cat meat indicates a lack of strictness in current laws. The trade, slaughter, and consumption of dog and cat meat pose numerous risks and dangers to consumer health if left unchecked and unregulated. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, approximately 100 deaths from rabies, 1,250 cases of parasitic infections, and 2,850 cases of food poisoning occur annually as a consequence of consuming dog and cat meat ^[27].

Legislative orientations and solutions to improve and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement on Dog and Cat Protection in Vietnam

Through the analysis, assimilation, and learning of legal regulations on dog and cat protection from developed countries such as England and South Korea, the authors propose the following recommendations for Vietnam to improve the current legal system for dog and cat protection and enhance its effectiveness in practice.

1. Legislative orientations

Firstly, approaching international animal welfare standards, based on the "Five Freedoms" principle ^[28], and ensuring that the use and breeding of animals meet humane conditions, minimizing the suffering inflicted on them in the context of the country's socio-economic development ^[29].

Secondly, gradually building a specialized legal framework for the protection of dogs and cats to overcome the situation of fragmented and overlapping regulations, while creating a unified legal basis for the application and implementation of the law.

Thirdly, strengthening management and gradually restricting the slaughter and trade of dog and cat meat instead of immediately prohibiting these activities, due to its important implications in minimizing potential violations such as dog and cat theft. At the same time, ensuring social stability and protecting public health, and preventing the ban from infringing on the rights and interests of those who have consumption habits and preferences, and those who earn income from this activity in society.

2. Legislative solutions

Firstly, unifying current legal regulations related to the classification of animals for dogs and cats to overcome the current fragmented and inconsistent situation.

Secondly, adding specific regulations on the dog and cat abuse, abandonment and theft, along with the issuance of sanctions for violations that are consistent, feasible, and deterrent. Specifically, individuals abusing dogs and cats (depending on the severity of the consequences); abandoning dogs and cats; or stealing dogs and cats should face sanctions including warnings, fines, non-custodial rehabilitation, temporary imprisonment, and individuals abandoning their dogs and cats deal with temporary deprivation of ownership of pets.

Thirdly, adding regulations that include dogs and cats in the list of animals subject to slaughter control. This contributes to ensuring food safety and hygiene, protecting public health, and is especially important in minimizing the use of food supplies from illegal supplements of stolen pets.

3. Enforcement Measures

Firstly, competent authorities should strengthen investigations, detection, and timely handling of violations of laws on the protection of dogs and cats.

Secondly, promoting propaganda, dissemination, and legal education to further raise public awareness, contributing to the formation and change of community thinking towards respecting and ensuring the welfare of dogs and cats.

Thirdly, organizing the synchronized and effective implementation of Microchip identification for dogs and cats nationwide through a solution of providing temporary cost support, developing a nationwide microchip network, and controlling and managing the status of pets through the Vneid Application^[30].

Fourthly, enhancing the role of animal rescue organizations that rescue and adopt abandoned and abused dogs and cats will create conditions for providing them with better lives and ensuring their welfare with new fosters or owners.

Fifth, with the long-term goal of gradually restricting the slaughter and trade of dog and cat meat, the government needs to implement policies to support sustainable livelihood transitions according to a suitable roadmap for individuals and households currently earning direct income from the trade and slaughter of dog and cat meat^[31].

Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of legal frameworks of dog and cat protection in England and South Korea, specifically concerning dog and cat abuse, abandonment, theft, and the trade, slaughter, and consumption of dogs and cats as food, the authors believe that the synchronized implementation of the above recommendations will contribute to improving the effectiveness of dog and cat protection activities, while also creating a positive shift in societal and community awareness of animal welfare. This will ultimately lead to the long-term goal of building a humane and sustainable society in Vietnam - where humans, animals, and the environment are respected and coexist harmoniously.

References

1. Angie Vega, Companion Animals: A Legislative Proposal to Redefine Their Legal Worth, *Tulane Law Review*, 2024; 98(5):975-983.
2. Delegation Affairs Committee, Journal of National Assembly Delegates on the improvement of legal policies on animal protection, Agricultural Publishing House, Hanoi, Annex, 2025:4:53-56.
3. Giles Watling MP. We need to properly ban the consumption of dog and cat meat in the UK, 2019. <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/we-need-to-properly-ban-the-consumption-of-dog-and-cat-meat-in-the-uk>, accessed on 27/01/2026.
4. National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Animal Protection Act 1991, amended, 2023.
5. National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Civil Act 1958, amended, 2024.
6. National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Special Act on the Termination of Breeding, Slaughter, and Distribution of Dogs for consumption, 2024.
7. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Animal Husbandry Law, 2018.
8. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Civil Code, 2015.
9. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Penal Code 2015, amended, 2025.
10. National Assembly of the UK, Animal Welfare Act 2006, amended in, 2024.
11. National Assembly of the UK, Sentencing Act 2020.
12. National Assembly of the UK, Pet Theft Act 2024.
13. National Assembly of England, The Microchipping of Cats and Dogs Regulations, 2023.
14. Nguyen Thi Thuy Dung, Pham Chan Hieu. The issue of animal protection from a legal perspective, a school-level scientific research project, Faculty of Law, Vietnam National University Hanoi, 2022, 12.
15. Nguyen Xuan Trach, Animal Welfare: Concepts and practices, National Conference on Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Science 2017, Can Tho, 2017, 3-4.
16. OIE, Terrestrial Animal Health Code 1968, amended, 2025.
17. Vietnamese Government, Decree No.14/2021/NĐ-CP on 01/03/2021 regulating administrative penalties for violations related to animal husbandry.
18. Vietnamese Government, Decree No.144/2021/NĐ-CP regulating administrative penalties for violations in the fields of security, order, social safety; prevention and control of social evils; fire prevention and fighting; rescue and relief; and prevention and control of domestic violence.
19. Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Circular No.01/2026/TT-BNNMT on 01/01/2026 regulating the quarantine of terrestrial animals and animal products.
20. Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Circular No.18/VBHN-BNNMT on 17/07/2025 regulating slaughter control and veterinary hygiene inspection.
21. Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Decree No.02/VBHN-BNNPTNT on 28/03/2022 regulating administrative penalties for violations in the field of veterinary medicine.
22. Xueyan Shan, Research on the legal Protection of Pet Animals, *Academic Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 2023:2(2):21-22.
23. Yoojin Choi, Seola Joo, Myung-Sun Chun, A Legal Ban on Dog Meat Production: Political Decision-Making for an Ethical Community, *Animals*, 2024:14(2269):1.
24. Yoon Min-sik. 9 out of 10 S. Koreans say they won't eat dog meat: survey, 2024. <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3298286>, accessed on 27/01/2026.
25. Xueyan Shan, Research on the legal Protection of Pet Animals, *Academic Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 2023:2(2):21-22.
26. Nguyen Thi Thuy Dung, Pham Chan Hieu, The issue of animal protection from a legal perspective, a school-level scientific research project, Faculty of Law, Vietnam National University Hanoi, 2022, 12.

27. Article 4 Animal Welfare Act 2006, amended in (UK), 2024.
28. Article 2.3 Animal Protection Act 1991, amended (South Korean), 2023.
29. Article 1.1 and Article 2.1 Pet Theft Act (UK), 2024.
30. Article 1.2 - Article 1.4, Article 2.2 and Article 2.3 Pet Theft Act (UK), 2024.
31. Article 10.3.1 - Article 10.3.3 Animal Protection Act 1991, amended (South Korean), 2023.
32. Regulations 2015/2283 (EU).
33. Giles Watling MP, We need to properly ban the consumption of dog and cat meat in the UK, 2019. <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/we-need-to-properly-ban-the-consumption-of-dog-and-cat-meat-in-the-uk>, accessed on 27/01/2026.
34. Article 5 Special Act on the Termination of Breeding, Slaughter, and Distribution of Dogs for consumption (Korean), 2024.
35. Article 8, Article 11 Special Act on the Termination of Breeding, Slaughter, and Distribution of Dogs for consumption (Korean), 2024.
36. Yoojin Choi, Seola Joo, Myung-Sun Chun. A Legal Ban on Dog Meat Production: Political Decision-Making for an Ethical Community, *Animals*, 2024:14 (2269):1.
37. Yoon Min-sik. 9 out of 10 S. Koreans say they won't eat dog meat: survey, 2024. <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3298286>, accessed on 27/01/2026.
38. Article 32.1, Article 32.2 Animal Welfare Act 2006, amended 2024 (UK); Article 1.7, Article 2.5 Pet Theft Act (UK), 2024.
39. Article 32.2.b Animal Welfare Act 2006, amended 2024 (UK); Article 122.1 Sentencing Act (UK), 2020.
40. Article 33.1, Article 33.2 Animal Welfare Act 2006, amended (UK), 2024.
41. Article 6 The Microchipping of Cats and Dogs Regulations (England), 2023.
42. Article 759 Civil Act 1958, amended 2024 (South Korea); Article 97 Animal Protection Act 1991, amended 2023 (South Korean); Article 17, Article 18 Special Act on the Termination of Breeding, Slaughter, and Distribution of Dogs for consumption (Korean), 2024.
43. Article 97.2.2 Animal Protection Act 1991, amended (South Korean), 2023.
44. Article 29.1 Decree No.14/2021/NĐ-CP (Vietnam).
45. Article 66.4 Animal Husbandry Law (Vietnam), 2018.
46. Article 105.1 Civil Code (Vietnam), 2015.
47. Article 15 Decree No.144/2021/NĐ-CP (Vietnam); Article 173 Penal Code 2015, amended (Vietnam), 2025.
48. Angie Vega, Companion Animals: A Legislative Proposal to Redefine Their Legal Worth, *Tulane Law Review*, 2024:98(5):975-983.
49. Annex I Circular No.01/2026/TT-BNNMT; Annex 1 Circular No.18/VBHN-BNNMT (Vietnam), 2025.
50. Article 17, Article 23 Decree No.02/VBHN-BNNPTNT (Vietnam), 2022.
51. Delegation Affairs Committee, Journal of National Assembly Delegates on the improvement of legal policies on animal protection, Agricultural Publishing House, Hanoi, Annex 4, 2025, 53-56.
52. Article 7.1.1 OIE, Terrestrial Animal Health Code 1968, amended, 2025.
53. Nguyen Xuan Trach, Animal Welfare: Concepts and practices, National Conference on Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Science 2017, Can Tho, 2017, 3-4.
54. Cao Le Hong Nguyen, Nguyen Hoang Yen Nhi. Regulations on dog and cat ownership around the world and recommendations for Vietnam, *Student Journal of Legal Science*, 2024, 50(2).
55. Le Son, Sustainable livelihood transition from the dog and cat trade and slaughter, 2025. <https://baotintuc.vn/xa-hoi/chuyen-doi-sinh-ke-ben-vung-tu-viec-buon-ban-giet-mo-cho-meo-20251211123613244.htm>, accessed on 27/01/2026.