

# Ukraine to stop killing stray dogs before Euro 2012 football championship

Environment ministry tells mayors to build animal shelters after bowing to pressure from Naturewatch in UK

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A dog by a poster reading, 'We were killed for Euro 2012' on World Animal Day in Kiev in October. Ukraine has called for an end to the killing of stray dogs ahead of the football championship. Photograph: Efrem Lukatsky/AP

**Ukraine** has bowed to pressure from western animal protection groups and called for an end to the killing of stray dogs before the Euro 2012 football

championship takes place in the country next summer.

The environment ministry said on Thursday that it was urging all Ukraine's mayors to build animal shelters instead.

Thousands of stray dogs have been killed in Ukraine over the past year – often poisoned or injected with illegal substances in an effort to clear the streets before the championship takes place in June – outraging local and international animal protection groups.

"Today I am publicly turning to all city mayors – let us stop the deaths of those poor stray animals for half a year and build shelters together,"

Mykola Zlochevsky, the environment minister, told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

The statement followed a meeting with representatives of Naturewatch, a British group campaigning against animal cruelty in Ukraine. "This is a fantastic victory for Ukraine, its citizens and its animals," John Ruane, the head of Naturewatch, said.

It remained unclear how the ban would be enforced. Ukraine has a large stray dog population, numbering tens of thousands in big cities, and building shelters to house the animals would take months.

Serhiy Syrovatka, a spokesman for the environment ministry, said the government would adopt legal and other changes to make the moratorium legally binding, adding that mayors who disobeyed would face punishment. The ministry intended to help manage and finance construction of shelters, Syrovatka said, adding that dogs that could not be housed in shelters would be sterilised and released.

He said funding such measures would be hard when the Ukrainian economy is relying on international loans.

The minister's comments appeared to suggest that the six-month ban was a temporary measure aimed at quelling criticism before Euro 2012. It was unclear whether the ban would remain in force beyond the championship.

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