

NSA sheep worrying by dogs awareness campaign 2025





Sheep worrying by dogs remains a blight on the industry

- 87% of respondents experienced a dog attack on their sheep in the last 12 months
- The majority of cases involve one dog (73%), with 23% of cases involving two dogs.
- 78% of respondents say the dog not being put on the lead is the main cause of sheep worrying by dogs – need for more responsibility. Theme across previous surveys.





Sheep attacks are becoming more severe with a greater level of injuries

- 96% of respondents had between 1-10 incidents in the last 12 months – remaining 4% had between 10-30.
- The average number of sheep killed in a single attack was higher than the 2023 survey - this doesn't take into account unborn and aborted lambs.
- One respondent reported 44 sheep killed in a single attack, with the next highest response being 23 sheep killed.
- 60% of respondents reported injuries from a dog bite and 37% of respondents reported injury as a result of being chased.
- Worryingly almost half of the respondents (43%) had to euthanise their sheep (43%), meaning animals have suffered extreme injuries from an attack.





NSA urges the public to take responsibility

- Concerningly, 43% of respondents found the evidence of a sheep worrying incident, which is higher than previous years.
- Only 20% of respondents were alerted directly – meaning animals are potentially left suffering.
- Many respondents said dog owners should take responsibility and raise awareness of this issue as well as a collective effort from vets, farmers, police, governments, schools and breeders.





Sheep farmers are feeling helpless and frustrated

- 80% of respondents had a negative experience when they approached a dog owner (higher than 2023), with only 5% saying the experience was positive.
- Just under half of respondents were verbally abused by the dog walker when asking them to put the dog on a lead – this has increased since the last survey in 2023. More reported physical abuse from the dog walkers too.
- There was a clear feeling of helplessness among respondents when asked about the outcome of reporting the incident.
- Only 3 respondents said the compensation received was adequate.





More education is needed to encourage respect for farmers

- 78% of respondents felt the incidents occurred as dog walker assumes their dog(s) won't attack livestock or won't cause damage if they do.
- Over half (51%) felt there is a lack of regard or concern for sheep worrying/sheep attacks.
- 27% of respondents said many presume their dog will respond to commands off the lead.
- One respondent commented: “Most people put the dog on lead and let it go again once they think I'm out of sight.”
- The number of respondents using signs has not changed in the last few surveys.





Investment in technology and improved police powers are crucial

- 98% of respondents agree there is an urgent need for additional police powers.
- 54% felt increased fines, punishments and seizure powers would reduce sheep worrying incidents.
- Just over half (58%) of respondents were aware of DNA sampling tools for sheep attacks, but not many were able to use it successfully.
- 26% of respondents didn't receive compensation as there was insufficient evidence

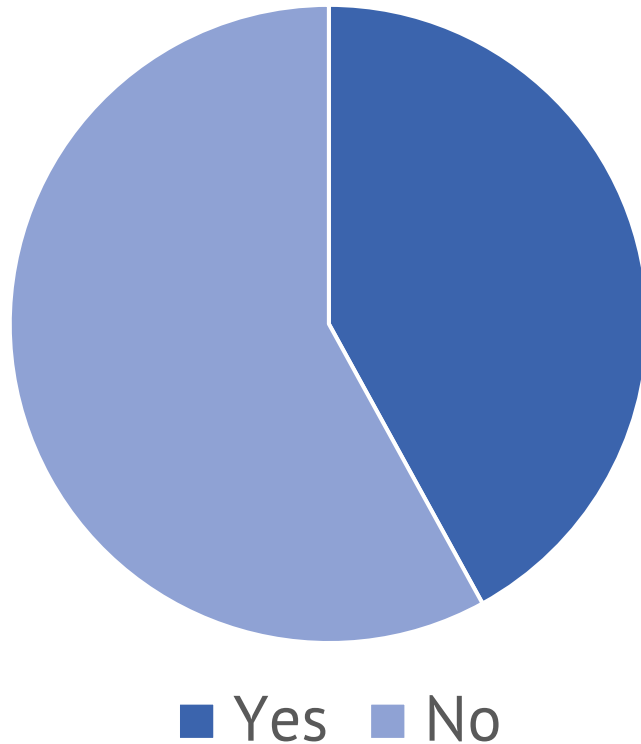




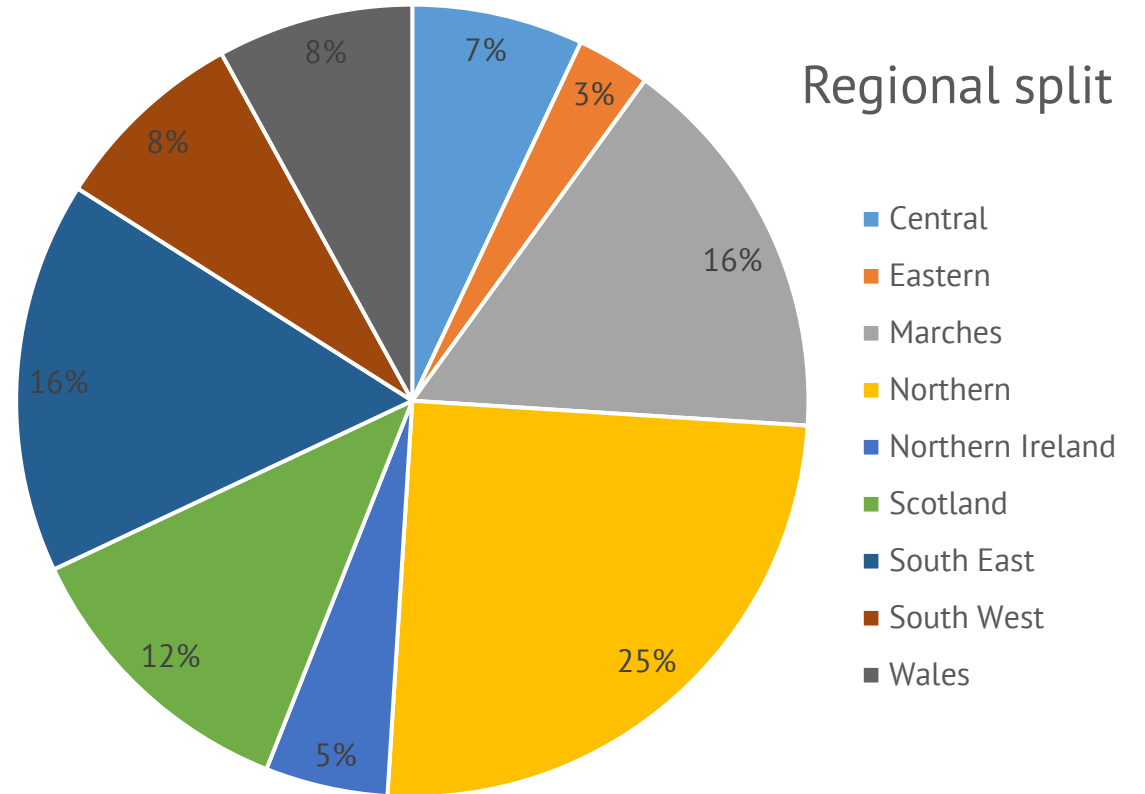
Contributor Profile

89 respondents,
42% NSA members

NSA member

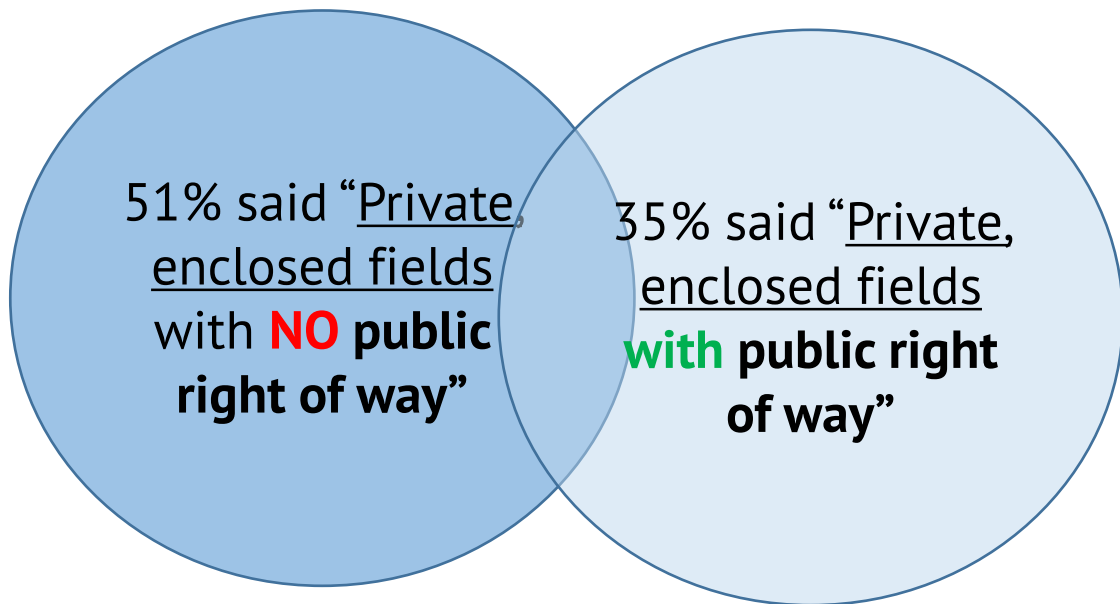


Regional split





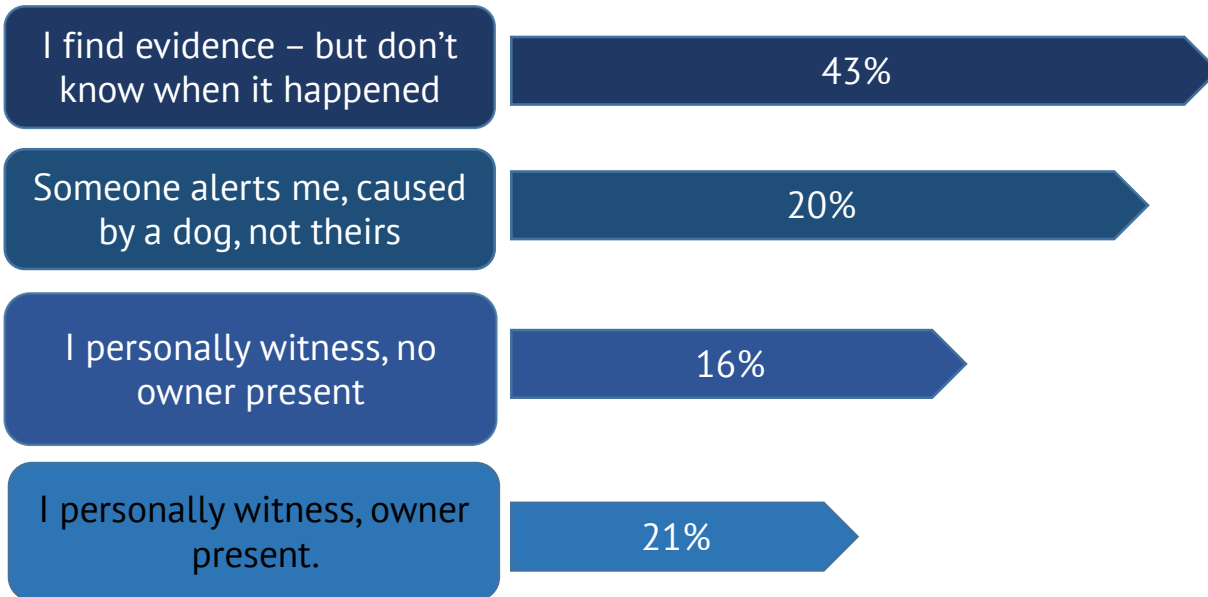
Nature of the incident



Where have you found sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents on your sheep occur?

Incidences of sheep worrying occur on private land with and without public access. Highlights the need for improved education and awareness of the serious issue of sheep worrying by dogs.

How do you commonly find out about sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents in your flock?



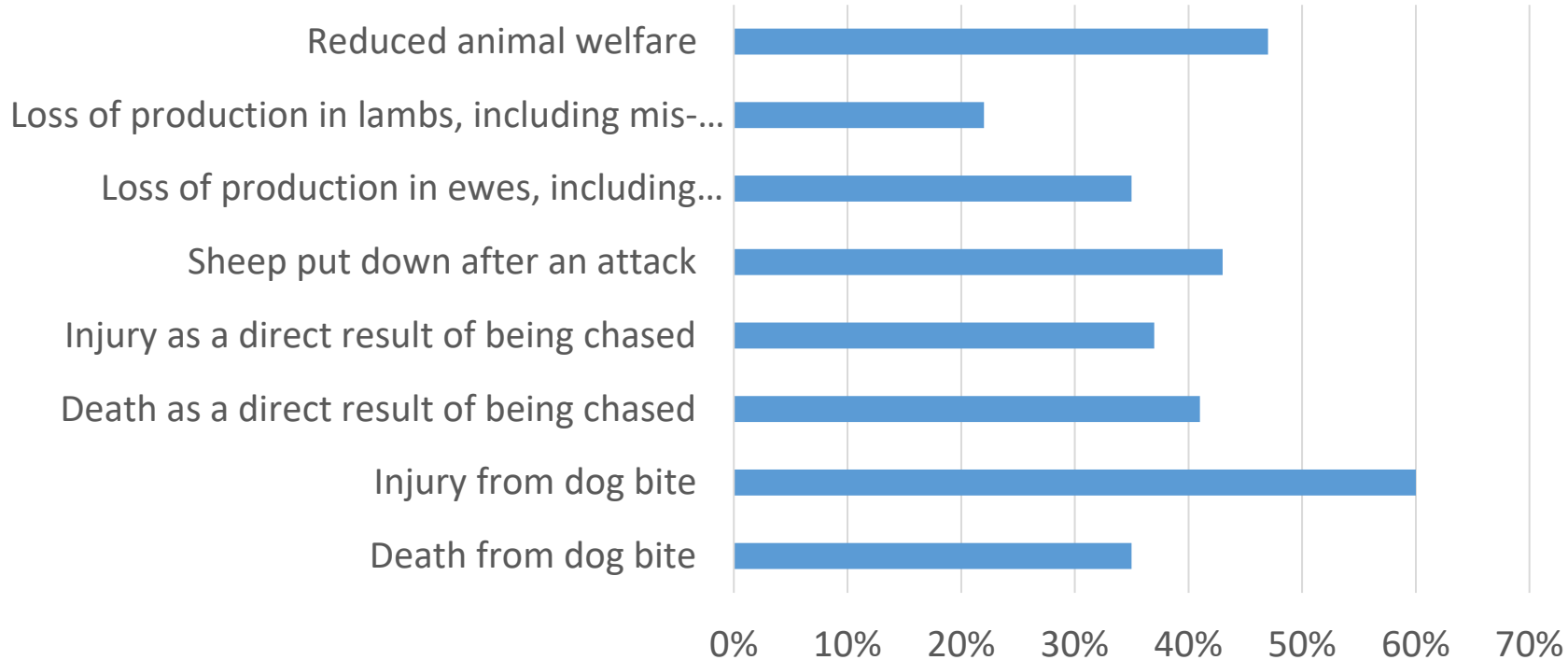
Worryingly, the number of respondents finding the evidence has increased since 2023 and the number of farmers being alerted has decreased.

In 79% of cases, the dog owner isn't present. Even more concerning is that in **43% of cases** the farmer is left to find the evidence of sheep worrying – suggesting animals are likely to be left suffering and injured causing extreme distress to the sheep and the farmer on discovering the upsetting scenes.



Nature of the incident

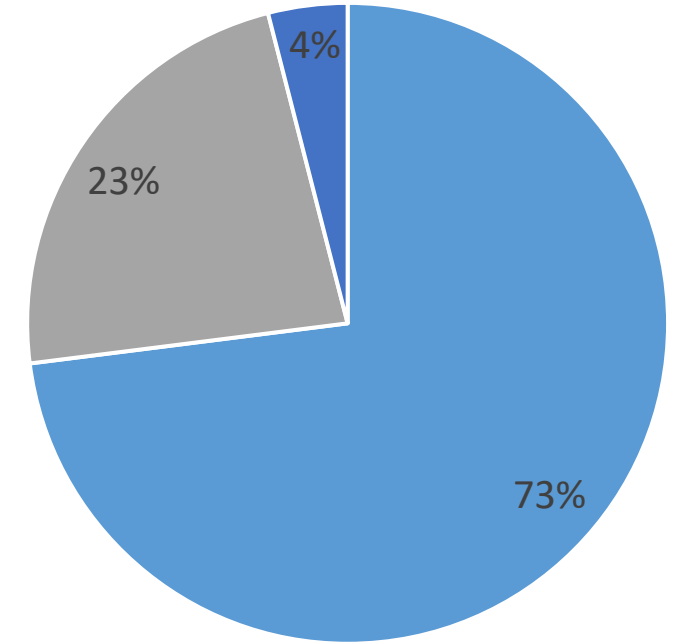
What impacts/injuries do you find most after sheep worrying?



Farmers still having major production losses, both immediate and long-term due to sheep worrying. This not only affects animal welfare but also the farmers health.

How many dog(s) are usually involved in a sheep worrying incident?

Number of dogs
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3+



In 73% of cases it's a single dog injuring or killing multiple sheep. Alarming 96% of respondents had between 1-10 incidents per year, the rest having 10+ incidents per year.





Farmers are left to pick up the pieces...

Unfortunately, most of the time the dog owners aren't present but when farmers do approach owners they are met with negative and defensive attitudes.

Reluctance and as soon as out of sight they let the dog off again.

Told "my dog would never do that"

Defensiveness, excuses and grumbling compliance

Refusal, aggression & vandalism of signs

Ridiculed and laughed at

What was the outcome/most common outcome of approaching the dog owner(s)/walker(s) to put their dog(s) on a lead?



Polite refusal to use lead - their beloved dog is too well trained to chase sheep and will stay to heel.



#LeadOn

The majority of farmers are left feeling angry and upset with this unnecessary incident.



Who should take responsibility for action?

Asked respondents who should take responsibility in educating and raising awareness with dog owners and the unanimous vote was **everyone**.

It should be a multi agency approach between vets, police, farmers, governments, schools, dog breeder/rehoming facilities.

School, college, University - any education facility.

Pet vet insurance providers, Vets, Dog breeders and sellers.

The owners are responsible for their dogs, so if they are not capable of knowing the laws they should not have dogs.

Prime time TV should have hard hitting adverts on the subject.

In your opinion, who should take responsibility in educating and raising awareness with dog owners?



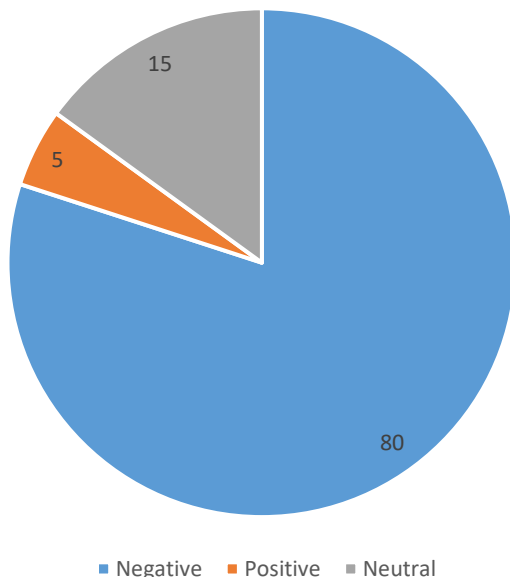
The Government. They passed the Access bill and should make sure the access takers are aware, held to account, everything from chasing to killing.



Farmer / Dog Owner communication



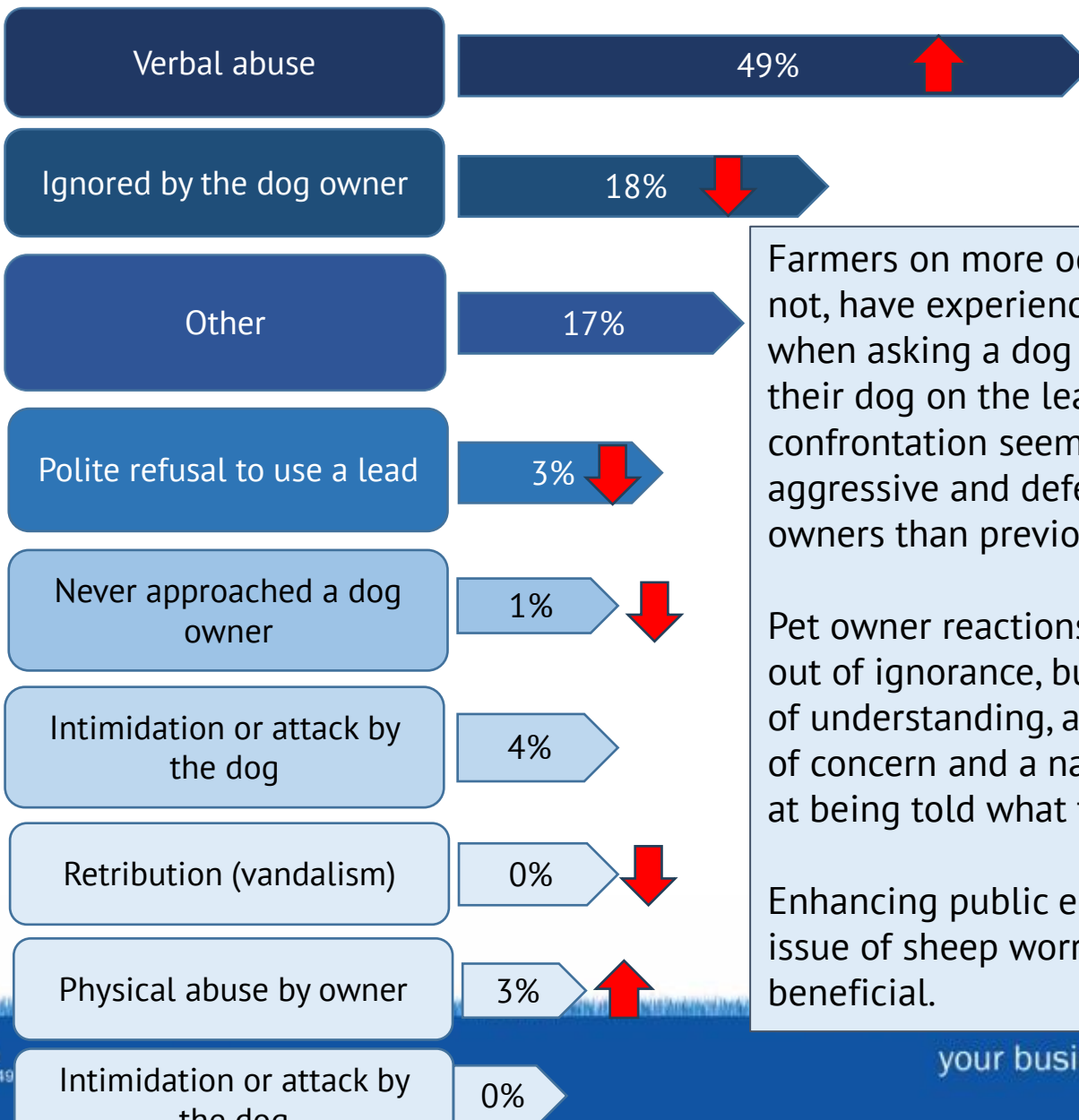
Dog owner response to farmer



If you approach a dog owner/walker to put their dog on a lead are you met with a positive or negative response?

Education is a key element in changing attitudes and behaviours to everyone's benefit. But farmers are still met with negative attitude from the majority of dog owners (when present).

What was the outcome of approaching a dog owner to put their dog on a lead?



Farmers on more occasions than not, have experienced verbal abuse when asking a dog owner to put their dog on the lead. Worryingly, confrontation seems to be more aggressive and defensive from dog owners than previous years.

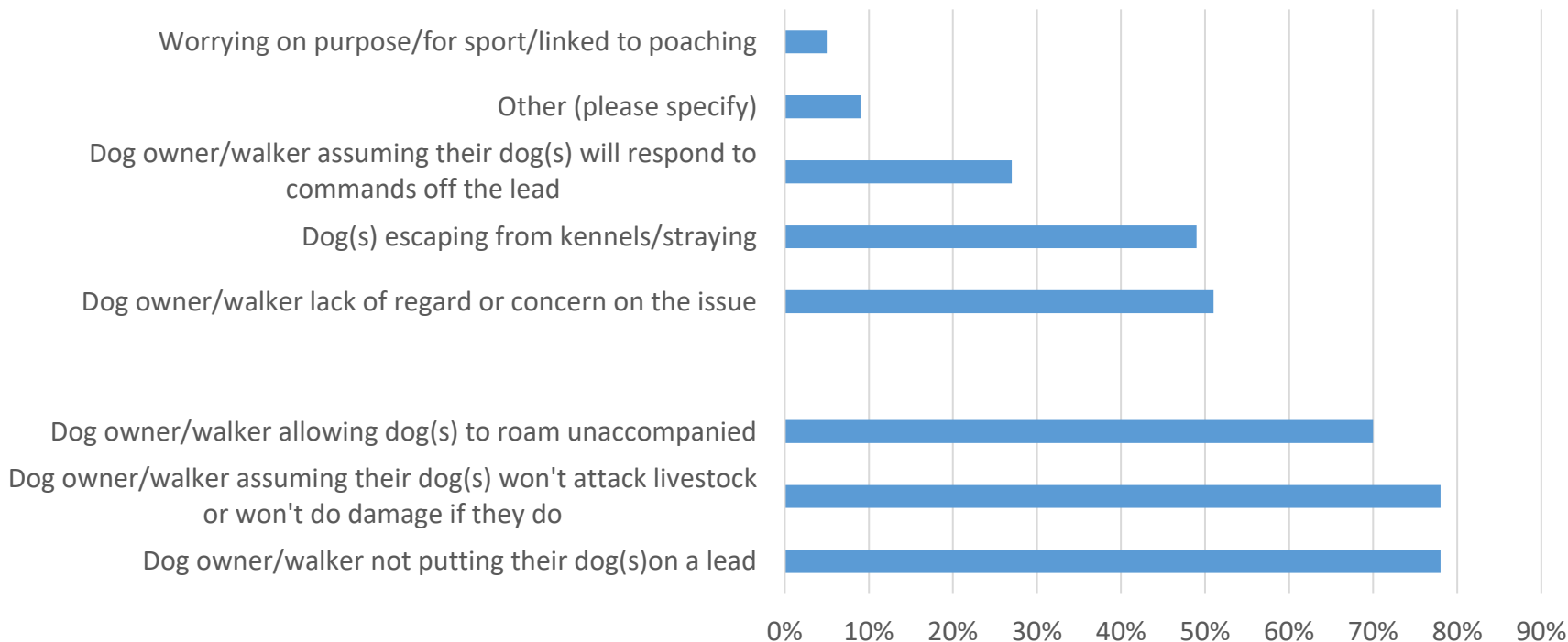
Pet owner reactions are usually not out of ignorance, but can be a lack of understanding, as well as a lack of concern and a natural push back at being told what to do.

Enhancing public education on the issue of sheep worrying would be beneficial.



Causes and deterrents

What do you consider to be the main causes on your farm of sheep worrying by dog(s)? tick all that apply?



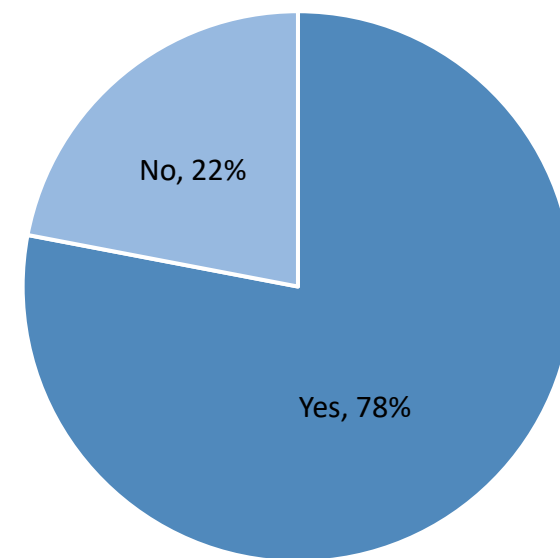
Respondents felt most cases are caused by the dog not being on the lead and out of control, as well as the assumption their dog won't attack livestock. This highlights a crucial gap in understanding and respect for our farmers' livelihoods. More education is essential to foster respect for farmers and their work. It's about changing the narrative and ensuring that pet owners recognize the risks involved.

The percentage of respondents using signs has been stagnant for the past few years, yet dog attacks has been increasing. Suggests more dogs must be escaping and/or the public are ignoring signs.

Previous years 2023 (78%), 2022 (78%) 2021 (72%), 2017 (71%), 2016 (64%).

Do you currently display warning signs asking the public to keep their dog on a lead around livestock?

Use of signs



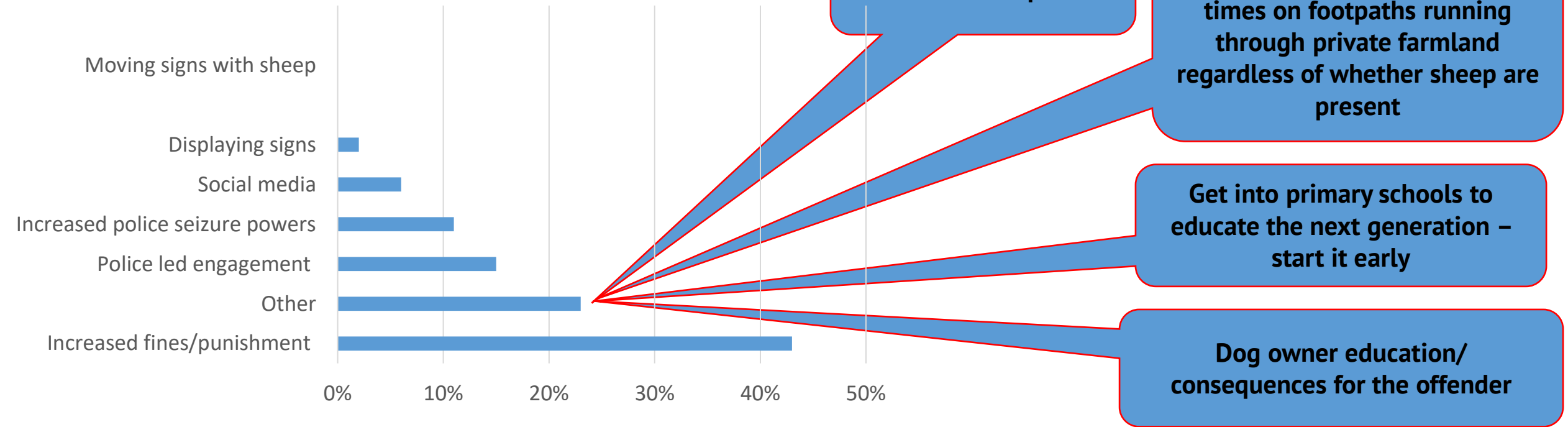
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Are signs the solution?

What activity/activities do you think would help reduce sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents?

What activities may help reduce sheep worrying?



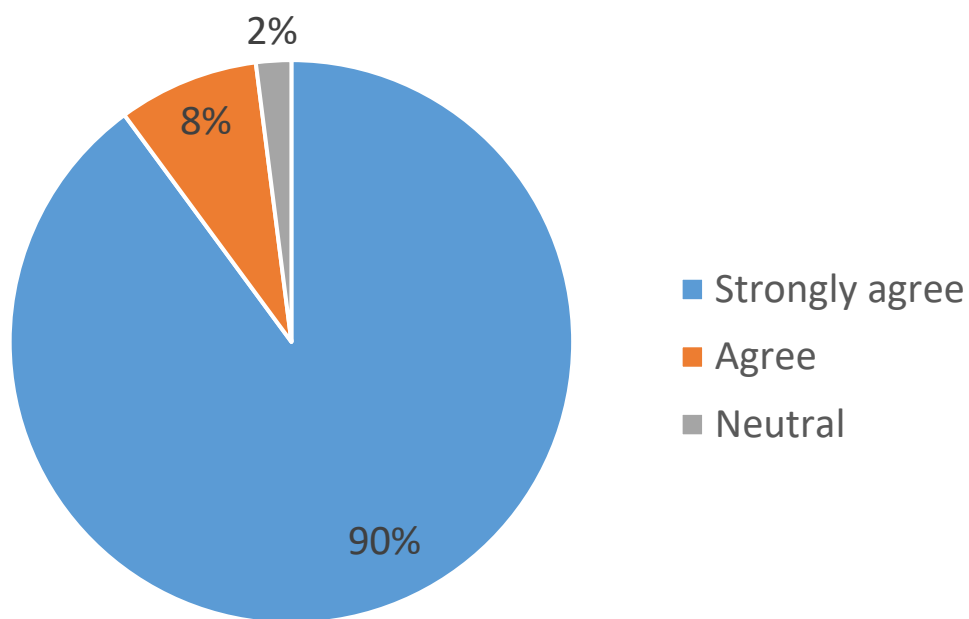
Respondents felt more powers and larger fines would encourage more responsible dog ownership. A lack of punishment and continued varied responses from Police Rural Crime teams is frustrating farmers who are experiencing great upset as well as financial loss because of this issue.

The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill should help provide increased police powers and fines – but the Bill is still being reviewed in parliament.

Education was another key area to be addressed to ensure respect for farmers and their livestock.



Do you agree additional powers are needed?



Do you agree additional powers are necessary across all UK administrations to respond to sheep worrying incidents, worrying, including increased penalties and additional powers for police to investigate and enforce the offence of livestock worrying and/or attack?

An overwhelming 98% agree there is an urgent need for additional police powers. This is a significant indicator of how the sheep farming community feels about the current situation. There is a real concern among sheep farmers the situation is spiralling out of control and becoming the norm.

Farmers are taking steps to protect their flocks including displaying signs, moving sheep to areas with less public access and working with communities via social media but unfortunately these actions are having little impact in reducing the number of sheep worrying incidents.

Increased powers and fines are proposed in new Kept Animals Bill are welcomed but NSA has concerns they are not strong enough to have a serious impact.

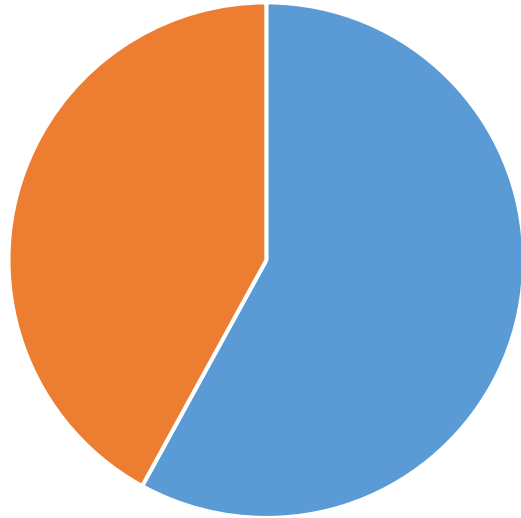




Role of DNA technology

Have you used DNA sampling tools, what was the outcome?

Are you aware of DNA sampling tools?



■ Yes ■ No

Told that DNA would only be useful if accompanied by CCTV evidence of the attack.

Unknown where to get kits from and if no known offender, of little use as there is no legislation allowing DNA to be collected from possible offenders

Told that the ability to take DNA and link dog to sheep did not yet exist

Issues with waiting on forensics to arrive when animal welfare is the priority

It's too costly and some forces unwilling to consider this course of action

Interestingly, while 58% of respondents are aware of DNA sampling tools for sheep attacks, few have successfully implemented them. Comments on those who have used it suggest a critical need for improvement in the sampling technology and better understanding of the technology within the police force. This points to a gap in knowledge or resources that needs addressing.



Compensation did you get it? Was it right?

Did you receive compensation for the financial losses of sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents?

Level of compensation	
I did not pursue compensation	47% ↓
I received insurance compensation	12% ↑
I pursued insurance compensation but it was not granted	2% ↑
I received court compensation	0% ↓
I pursued court compensation but it was not granted	1% ↑
I received compensation from the dog owner/walker directly	12% ↓
I would prefer not to say	4%
I received partial insurance compensation	4% ↑
Other (owner not known)	18%
I received partial court compensation	1%

Only paid for fatalities

Nothing compensates for being mentally on edge for the next time it happens

Not really - covered the ewes, but not their unborn lambs

High costs of insurance claims vs. compensation

Difficulty in assessing the stress experienced by surviving animals.

Do you feel the compensation amount received fully covered the actual financial loss to your business?

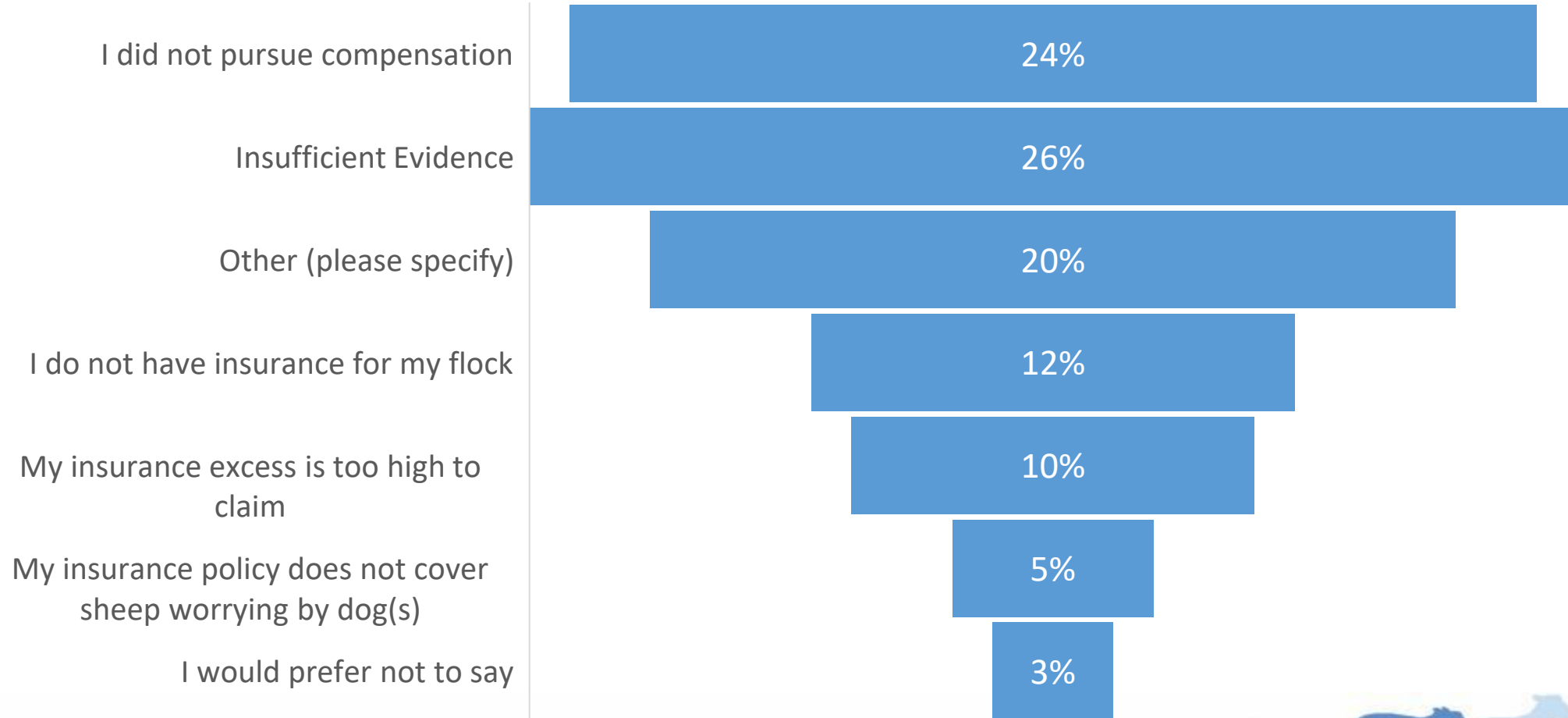


Why didn't you receive compensation?

If you did not receive compensation for the financial losses of sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents, why was this the case?

While compensation is seen as very important to cover the costs & impact of an attack by dogs, a small number of cases are pursued. Those that do pursue, only a small percentage receive any form of recompense.

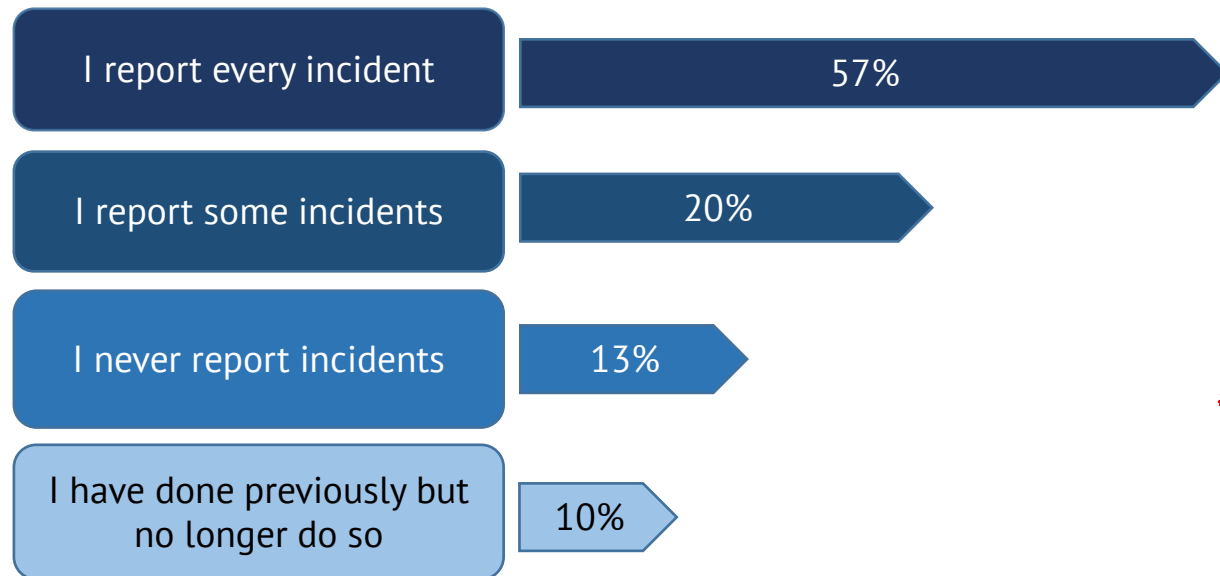
Most often the dog owner cannot be identified - dogs are unaccompanied – and there is insufficient evidence.





Reporting sheep worrying

Do you report sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents to the police?



Many cases are left unresolved as there is a lack of evidence, leading to an attitude of 'what's the point in reporting'. If they are not reported the true scale of the serious issue will never be fully appreciated and the work of NSA to push for stricter legislation and enforcement will not be realised. Without the stats NSA, the industry and police can't get policy changed and powers increased.

Requested compensation but was ignored by owner

I receive no compensation as the dog and dog owner cannot be identified by the video and pictures taken

No compensation as guilty owners were never traced

No, owner denied it was her dog

If you did not receive compensation for the financial losses of sheep worrying by dog(s) incidents, why was this the case?



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Police reporting and outcome

If you have reported an incident of sheep worrying by dog(s) to the police, what was the outcome or what is the most common outcome?

Outcome of reporting to police

Given a crime reference number	16%
Given an incident number	11%
Dog owner received restraining/resettling order for dog(s)	↓ 1%
Agreed out of court settlement with dog owner	↓ 3%
Dog(s) destroyed	↓ 1%
No outcome	↑ 25%
Have not reported to the police	11%
Other (dog could not be found, police visit, lack of evidence, reluctance from police, nothing happens, can't find owner, verbal warning from police).	24%



NO ATTACK
SHOULD GO
UNNOTICED

REPORT ALL
SHEEP
WORRYING
CASES TO
YOUR
REGIONAL
POLICE FORCE



Police action varies
across the UK.



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