

Reports and Comments

NC3Rs vision document sets out plans for the 3Rs over the next decade

The UK's National Centre for Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) recently launched their plans for the following 10 years (*Our Vision: 2015-2025*). The document provides an overview of the centre's strategy for promoting the 3Rs during the centre's second decade (the NC3Rs was established in 2004). The document outlines the '5Ps' over which the centre plans to have influence: Practice in the biosciences; Procedures on animals; People in the biosciences; Places where animal research is carried out; and Policy related to animal research. In the document, the NC3Rs envision the state of the 3Rs in 2025.

One vision of the strategy is that there should not have been an increase in animals used in research in the UK despite increased research activity and investment in the bioscience sector. This focus is clearly a result of recent trends whereby increased research activity and developments in the generation of genetically modified animals has led to an overall increase in the numbers of animals used in research in the UK despite advances in the reduction and replacement of animals in many models. For continued public acceptance of animal research it is likely that a significant reduction in total animal use over the next decade will be needed and the coalition government has also committed itself to reducing the number of animals used in research. The NC3Rs plans to promote improvements in scientific technique and replacement technologies which should lead to a reduction in the total number of animals used.

Another vision is to support people to "accelerate change" through training researchers and others in 3Rs' methodology. The NC3Rs aims to play a significant role in educating scientists about the 3Rs as well as supporting the careers of researchers dedicated specifically to the 3Rs, who they hope will become "3Rs ambassadors". This vision will require significant commitments from research institutions, particularly the universities and it will be encouraging if this is achieved by persuading institutions to commit significant time and resources to 3Rs' education and research.

Assessment and reduction of the impact of research on animals is addressed in the Practice objective which aims to promote development of "standardised objective measures of animal welfare". For realistic analysis of the harm/benefit balance of animal use in science it will be necessary for the harms to be reliably quantified; at present both advocates and opponents of research on animals rely excessively on conjecture.

The NC3Rs' vision for embedding of a 3Rs' culture in the places where research is carried out aims to improve knowledge and acceptance of the 3Rs in research establishments; recent exposes in the UK have highlighted that despite significant progress and the UK's leading role in the 3Rs there is still significant room for improvements in the "culture of care" in some institutions.

The final vision — on policy, marks a shift towards internationalisation on the part of the NC3Rs in that they aim to "increase international support for the 3Rs" and "improve global harmonisation of regulatory 3Rs practice". Whilst the UK is arguably a global leader in the welfare of animals used in research, unless this expertise is used to influence practice beyond the UK then it is likely that some research may go elsewhere to avoid the regulatory burden which some perceive as more onerous in the UK than elsewhere. Furthermore, the inevitable rapid growth of research in emerging economies presents significant challenges to animal welfare which could be reduced by dissemination of UK-based expertise worldwide.

The vision outlined in the document is a deliberately broad and high-level one with little in the way of concrete proposals, but it presents a commitment to keeping the UK at the forefront of implementing and promoting the 3Rs. It will be interesting to revisit this document in 10 years to see how progress has matched the vision.

Our Vision 2015-2025: NC3Rs (2013). Available at: http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Corporate_publications/NC3Rs%20Our%20Vision%202015-2025.pdf.

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Equine identification and welfare

In 2013, throughout the European Union (EU), there were a number of reported incidences of horse meat entering the human food chain in meat products labelled as other animal origin (eg beef and pork). While not necessarily an animal welfare issue as such, concerns were raised over the lack of traceability within the food supply chain and this highlighted failings of equine identification and traceability systems within the EU. There are approximately 7 million horses within the 28 member countries of the EU.

A number of organisations in the United Kingdom have reported problems with the current system of identifying horses and in 2014 the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) and the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Horse (APPG for the Horse), in association with the Equine Sector Council, published a briefing document entitled: *The Urgent Need for an Effective, Enforceable and Enforced Equine Identification System*. In the document they state that: "The inability to link a horse to its owner is one of the most significant barriers to holding irresponsible horse owners and breeders to account for welfare abuses".

The document highlights a number of deficiencies within the current equine identification system, such as: over 75 Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs); PIOs operating to different standards; fraudulent and duplication of passports; low enforcement of the identification rules by local authorities; and poor understanding and negativity of horse owners towards the current system.

One of the areas in which inadequate equine identification can effect equine welfare is fly-grazing, which is the practice of illegally grazing horses on public or private land without the landholder's permission. Fly-grazing can be detrimental to a horse's welfare because the horses involved are more likely to experience reduced welfare through: poor body condition; insufficient food; worm and lice infestation; and lack of foot, dental and veterinary care. Other concerns raised by fly-grazing are: horses may cause damage to crops, fences and land; landowners may experience significant inconvenience, intimidation and costs; and public safety issues can occur if horses escape onto roads. It is estimated that there are around 2,500 horses being fly-grazed in Wales and 3,000 horses in England, the majority of which are not identifiable.

Current legislation requires local authorities (LAs) to wait at least two weeks before fly-grazing horses can be removed and detained if an owner cannot be contacted. However, since the APGAW and APPG for the Horse briefing document was published, a Private Members', Control of Horses, Bill, has been introduced, which it is hoped will enable LAs to tackle fly-grazing more effectively. The Bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons in October 2014 and will now move onto the committee stage where it will be considered by a panel of Members of Parliament. The Control of Horses Bill would give LAs: powers to remove and detain fly-grazing horses more quickly; more routes through which authorities may dispose of horses (currently they must be sold at market or through auction. The new Bill would allow LAs to give the horses to a rescue charity if appropriate); and greater powers to recover expenses both for any damage that a fly-grazing horse may have caused, and for any costs that may have been incurred during the horse's detention.

Another area of concern raised in the Report is the long-standing Tripartite Agreement (originally established in the 1970s) which allows the free movement of horses, carrying a valid passport, between the United Kingdom, Ireland and France without the need for health certification. For many years, only horses considered to be of high-health status (eg registered racehorses) were included within the agreement, but in 2005 the scheme was opened up to allow the free movement of all horses, bar those destined for slaughter (which still, in theory, required a veterinary health certification). However, after widening the scheme, it was found that many low-value horses were being moved between countries and there was some evidence that these horses were then being sent on for slaughter illegally. Additionally, there were concerns about the spread of equine disease, and the resulting welfare issues, following a number of disease incidences after which it was difficult to trace other horses moved in the same consignment. As of May 2014, the Tripartite Agreement has been revised to, once again, only allow horses of higher health status to move freely.

A further development that has occurred with regards to equine identification and control has been made at the EU level. In September 2014, Commission Regulation (EC) No

504/2008, which lays out the rules for the identification of horses within the EU, was amended. New key requirements are that all member states must implement a centralised equine database from 1 July 2016 along with greater controls on horse microchips. There must also be new minimum standards for horse passports.

It is hoped that a benefit of updating equine identification and control measures within the UK and throughout the EU is the improvement of horse welfare. Greater traceability will assist with both ensuring horse owners are held accountable for the welfare of their animals, and improving control of equine disease.

The Urgent Need for an Effective, Enforceable and Enforced Equine Identification System (2014). A4, 9 pages. Briefing produced by the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) and the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Horse, along with the Equine Sector Council. Available from the APGAW website: <http://www.apgaw.org/equine-identification-report-2014>.

Control of Horses Bill: A Bill to Make Provision for the Taking of Action in Relation to Horses Which in Public Places; and for Connected Purposes (2014). A4, 4 pages. Presented by Julian Sturdy and printed by authority of the House of Commons, London, UK. For further information on the Control of Horses Bill and its progress, please visit: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/controlofhorses.html>.

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Rodeo Code of Welfare updated in New Zealand

The term 'rodeo' originally stems from the verb 'rodear' which was used to describe the gathering of cattle in the early 1800s, an integral part of cattle ranching. Over the years, 'rodeos' have evolved into sporting competitions which feature a number of events, such as bareback bronco riding, bull-riding, and various roping and tying activities, the aim being to showcase the speed and skill of cowboys and cowgirls.

As rodeos have evolved, so has society's awareness and knowledge of the welfare needs of animals and, increasingly, these events have received criticism from members of the general public and some animal welfare organisations. It is questioned how relevant these competitions of rider skill are to today's farming practices and concerns have been raised about the way in which animals are handled may cause them unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress (a small percentage of rodeo animals are seriously injured or euthanased every year during the course of training and competitions). Additionally, there is debate over the message that rodeos give to people, especially children, about how animals should be cared for and respected. Consequently, rodeos have been banned completely in some countries and are restricted in others, eg certain events are not permitted (such as those involving calves), or particular 'aids' are prohibited (eg the flank strap, spurs with locked rowels).

However, the New Zealand (NZ) National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) consider rodeos still to be