

Following on from this steer, the inquiry also states that KC breed standards should ensure that the confirmation they require ensure that a dog is 'fit for purpose' rather than simply meeting an arbitrarily set of standards based upon visual aesthetics. Further recommendations regarding which dogs are allowed to participate in KC dog shows and a requirement for health screening for involvement in these are also made, along with a greater role for the veterinarian in developing strategies to improve the health of dogs identified, through the issuing of health certificates. Puppy sale contracts to protect the consumer are called for and Defra is advised that it should take forward a public awareness campaign on the disadvantages of buying a puppy without careful consideration.

The inquiry was aware, however, that such voluntary calls and recommendations for action may not be sufficient to ensure the health and welfare of all dogs are adequately protected. In such a situation, the inquiry states that regulation of health and welfare standards will have to occur through the passing of relevant legislation, to include a code of good practice. The inquiry believes that the formation of an independent advisory body would be the best way to achieve this, which would provide advice and make recommendations through the KC to breed clubs and societies on the setting of breed standards and to advise the government on the need for further action. The timeframe that APGAW suggest for judging the success of the Kennel Club's efforts in taking forward these recommendations and setting its house in order is not long, only up to the next UK general election, which must occur before June 2010. The inquiry believes that this is all the time that is needed to allow these changes to be made, and that after the election a judgement should be made as to their effectiveness and the need for legislative control.

(NB: The Kennel Club response to the APGAW report can be found here: <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/2768/23/5/3>)

A Healthier Future for Pedigree dogs. The Report of the APGAW Inquiry into the Health and Welfare Issues Surrounding the Breeding of Pedigree Dogs (November 2009). The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, A4, 56 pages. Available to be downloaded from <http://www.apgaw.org/reports.asp>

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Project to develop animal welfare risk assessment guidelines on stunning and killing

In December 2005, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) held a scientific colloquium in Parma on 'Principles of risk assessment of food producing animals'. One of the conclusions was that there was no standardised methodology for animal welfare risk assessments. Since then various EFSA animal welfare reports have been published which include risk assessments but none of these addressed stunning and killing of farmed and laboratory animals. This is the subject of a report published in October 2009 (see details below).

Everyone would like there to be clear, unambiguous, scientifically-grounded methodology for animal welfare assessment but in the introduction the authors draw attention to the difficulties. "Definitions of animal welfare can hardly be defended scientifically. Instead they are formulated on the basis of the context and the goals one wants to achieve. Regardless of the definition chosen there will be alternative views on what is an appropriate definition. However, some definitions are more useful than others in a scientific context. From a risk management and communication perspective, the choice should also match the opinion of most people, or at least be understandable or acceptable."

The objective of risk assessment is to identify and characterise potential hazards (in this case to animal welfare) and to estimate the probability and magnitude of their effects. The application of risk assessment to animal welfare is relatively new and the development of methodologies is 'work in progress'. In Chapter 4, the authors review the use of the risk assessment approach in recent EFSA reports and discuss some of the difficulties in comparison with risk assessment approaches to food safety (which are, arguably, much more straightforward).

The Report includes a review of stunning and killing methods including electrical methods, captive bolt, free bullet, water jet, air jet, neck dislocation and decapitation and also considers public health implications of various methods. It then goes on to consider the welfare risks at stunning and killing and how these risks may be assessed. Lists of potential hazards were drawn from literature surveys and a 5-point scale was developed for categorisation of the severity of adverse effects. Based on the analyses, tables are presented of good stunning and killing practices and critical control points for various stages of the procedure. For example, for slaughter cattle: unloading to lairage, holding pens, passageway, during restraint and during stunning. For each potential hazard, these tables list 'dos' and 'don'ts'. For example, for use of captive bolts, the 'dos' are "no corneal reflex no rhythmic breathing" and the 'don'ts' are "do not continue if recovery signs present".

The Report ends with a recommendation that the commissioning of a risk question needs to be formalised and as limited as possible. It provides useful information and analysis and illustrates the challenges of developing welfare assessment methods.

Project to Develop Animal Welfare Risk Assessment Guidelines on Stunning and Killing (October 2009). Prepared by Algers B, Anil, H, Blokhuis H, Fuchs K, Hultgren J, Lambooi B, Nunes T, Paulson P, and Smulders F. Technical Report submitted to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). 88 Pages with an annex of 25 pages. Available at: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1211902958022.htm

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