

## Animal welfare in the European Union

Animal welfare continues to be a topic of public interest and within the European Union (EU) a study has recently been commissioned, supervised and published by the EU Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs investigating: 'Animal welfare in the European Union'.

Authored by Emeritus Professor Donald Broom from the University of Cambridge, the Report discusses the study findings under 12 main headings: 1) Introduction; 2) The scientific concept of animal welfare; 3) Welfare as part of sustainability and product quality; 4) Welfare in relation to health; 5) One health and one welfare; 6) A brief history of EU animal welfare legislation and policies; 7) International effects of EU animal welfare policies and legislation; 8) Public attitudes to animal welfare and the value of EU animal welfare legislation to consumers and to the animal user industries; 9) Animal welfare legislation, enforcement and impact on animals; 10) Deficiencies in current EU animal welfare legislation and policy; 11) Recent changes in EU animal welfare policy and their possible consequences; and 12) Possibilities for future EU animal welfare policy. Each section opens with 'Key findings' and then goes into more detail.

Within the Report it is made clear that EU policy has improved the lives of many millions of animals both within and outside of the EU, through: increased consumer awareness of animal sentience and welfare; the introduction of legislation that protects animal welfare; reports published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which provide scientific evidence in support of animal welfare; and provision of EU funding for animal welfare science projects (eg Welfare Quality®, Animal Welfare Indicators [AWIN], and Horizon 2020).

For example, EU legislation improved the welfare of animals within the EU via Directive 97/2/EC which phased out the use of veal crates and diets deficient in iron and roughage when raising veal calves. The Report states that this Directive "enormously improved the welfare of calves in the EU". An example of how EU legislation resulted in improved welfare of animals outside of the EU is Directive 2001/88/EC, which banned the close confinement of pregnant sows (eg gestation crates and tethers). This Directive led to other countries also banning close confinement of sows, including: Canada, New Zealand and nine states in USA, additionally, many major companies made a commitment to only using pork from producers who do not use sow stalls (eg McDonalds).

However, the Report argues that there is much still to be done. "In recent years, despite there being much new scientific research on the welfare of animals, some of it reviewed by EFSA, there has been no extension of EU legislation to new species". Within Section 10 (concerned with deficiencies in current EU animal welfare legislation) attention is drawn to the fact that many animal species are not yet protected under EU law. The top ten commonest animals kept for human use in Europe are given as: broiler chickens (4,000 million); trout (1,000 million); Atlantic salmon (440 million); laying hens (400 million); farmed rabbits (340 million); ducks and geese (170 million); turkeys (150 million); pigs (148 million); bovines (88 million) and sheep (83 million). However, only broiler chickens, laying hens, pigs and dairy calves (not dairy cows) are currently protected under EU legislation. It is suggested that where EFSA Reports and Opinions are available for unprotected species, then these documents could be used as a basis for legislation. Additionally, even where legislation is in place, animal welfare may still be poor, especially in situations where implementation and enforcement of standards and regulations are difficult.

The Report gives examples of a wide variety of welfare issues in various species to show the scale of pain and suffering experienced by many animals, including: leg problems in broiler chickens; leg disorders, mastitis and reproductive disorders in high-yielding dairy cows; fin-chewing in farmed trout and salmon; infectious disease, foot disorders and stereotypies in farmed rabbits; force-feeding in ducks and geese for foie gras production; live feather-plucking of geese; mutilations of sheep and cattle; bull-fighting; and deliberate cruelty to wild animals.

The final section of the report — 12) Possibilities for future EU Animal Welfare Policy — highlights the importance of scientific evidence when considering animal welfare and also the need for information exchange. It is also recommended that an overarching 'Animal Welfare Law' be considered to protect all animals used by people (similar to the Animal Health Law adopted in the EU in March 2016).

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