

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

European Commission review of farmed-animal welfare legislation in non-EU countries and implications for the EU

The EU Member States recently asked the Commission to undertake a review of standards of animal welfare in non-EU countries. Their concern for this stemmed from recognition that (i) there is a trend towards increasing legislation for the welfare of farmed animals in the EU; (ii) this can result in extra costs to producers, and (iii) this may put EU producers at a competitive disadvantage compared to non-EU producers if the latter are free of legal obligations for comparable animal welfare standards. The report of this enquiry is an interesting read. This subject is of critical importance to developments in animal welfare standards around the world.

Despite admitting that the study was “largely inconclusive”, the Commission indicates that it believes it to be important to pursue these concerns since competitive distortions arising from differing national standards “have the clear potential to undermine higher animal welfare standards”. Although “the means to address these distortions are nonetheless not immediately apparent”, the Commission considers that they can be addressed in several ways. These include:

- the freedom of consumers to press for higher standards by purchasing only products from animals kept to high welfare standards;
- development of labelling schemes to facilitate the above;
- international dialogue (including at the Office International des Epizooties and the Council of Europe) aimed at persuading non-EU countries to afford greater recognition to animal welfare; and
- the need to explore mechanisms to address any deficiencies in how animal welfare considerations are properly recognised in the prices paid to producers.

As part of the study, Directorate Generale SANCO contacted the main countries which export livestock produce to the EU to request information about livestock welfare legislation. The results are summarised as an Appendix and these show, among other things, that Chile, India and the Philippines have no legislation or official codes of conduct regulating the slaughter of animals, and that there are neither laws nor codes of conduct regulating livestock transport in Botswana, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, India and the Philippines.

It is recognised in the report that the level of animal welfare legislation in the EU (even if compliance is often lacking) compares well with that in non-EU countries and that the EU legislation has often had an ‘inspiring’ effect and served as an example for many other countries to follow. It is important that the ways forward identified by the Commission in this report are pursued vigorously. In the long run, moves towards international standards are likely to come about through better shared agreement about the needs of animals, and animal welfare science has a key role to play in this.

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Animal Welfare Legislation on farmed animals in Third Countries and the Implications for the EU (November 2002) Published by the Commission of the European Communities. COM(2002)626 final. 44 pp A4. Available at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2002/com2002_0626en01.pdf.

Amendment to zoo legislation in England and Wales

The zoo licensing legislation has been amended to bring it into line with the requirements of the European Directive on zoos. One of the main changes is the inclusion of provisions requiring zoos to implement the following conservation measures:

- (i) participating in at least one of the following: research for the conservation benefit of wild animals, provision of training in relevant conservation skills, exchange of information relevant to wildlife conservation, captive breeding and reintroduction where appropriate;

- (ii) promoting public education about conservation of biodiversity;
- (iii) providing animals with captive environments which aim to satisfy their physical, psychological and social needs and their conservation requirements, and providing high standards of veterinary care;
- (iv) preventing escape of animals;
- (vii) preventing pests and vermin in zoos; and
- (viii) keeping up-to-date records of the health, births, deaths and disposal of animals.

The Government's Zoos Forum has already given considerable thought to the detail of how these new provisions should be taken forward in practice. The Secretary of State's Standards for Modern Zoo Practice were revised in 2000 to take into account the new provisions in advance of their becoming law, and the Zoos Forum has been developing guidance for the zoo community on conservation, education and research in zoos, and on what standards and efforts in these areas might be found acceptable to zoo inspectors. This guidance is to be published on the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) website shortly (www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/gwd/index.htm).

The amendment also sets out the responsibilities of the local authority for the welfare and disposal of zoo animals in cases where zoos have closed and the previous management is no longer capable of dealing properly with these issues. This provides local authorities with the power, and obligation, to direct the future care and disposal of animals under these circumstances.

The Zoo Licensing Act 1981 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (December 2002) Statutory Instruments 2002 No. 3080. Published by The Stationery Office, P O Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN, UK. Price £3.50. Available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/publications/legislation>.

Guidance on amendment to England's Welfare of Animals (Killing or Slaughter) Regulations 1995

The welfare of livestock at slaughter and killing is regulated by Europe under the EU Council Directive 93/119/EC which was adopted in 1993. Since then there have been various developments in slaughter and killing methods of relevance to welfare. Because there is no indication that the European Commission will be revising the Directive in the near future, the Government has decided to update the legislation in England to take account of this new research. Following consultations with interested parties, the amendment to the regulations is to be published and come into force shortly. Guidance notes have been produced by DEFRA in advance of this.

The guidance notes indicate that the new amendment will make four changes. It will permit the wider use of a new percussive killing device for use when poultry have to be killed for disease reasons; it will end the current ban in England on the bleeding of animals in the sight of others of the same species; it will reduce the maximum time for which turkeys and other poultry may be hung on a shackle line before stunning to 3 min and 2 min, respectively; and it will require suspended or revoked slaughter licences to be surrendered to the Meat Hygiene Service. The guidance notes outline the DEFRA-funded research that underpins the rationale for these changes, which are expected to come into force in April 2003.

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 1995 (WASK '95) 2003: Guidance (January 2003) Published by the Animal Welfare Division of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK. 3 pp A4. Available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare>.