

Working Party completes work on revision of Council of Europe Convention for the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes

In May 1997, Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes (ETS 123) passed a resolution on the accommodation and care of laboratory animals. This resolution marked the start of a process of revision of Appendix A to the Convention, which, now nearly 8 years later, is nearing its end. Most people who have been involved in the process would agree that the mechanism of revision has not been ideal and that the process has been extremely protracted; nonetheless it has been worthwhile.

The current, unrevised, Appendix provides guidelines on the accommodation and care of laboratory animals that were drawn up in 1986, at approximately the same time as the current Home Office Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals used in Scientific Procedures. However, the scope of the Appendix is restricted and it currently provides little species-specific advice beyond that of minimum space requirements. To address this in the revision, it was agreed early on in the process that any revisions should take into account current good practice, what is known about the natural history of the animals, and research on particular housing and husbandry issues. The Working Party charged with producing draft revisions held its eighth meeting in Strasbourg from the 22nd to 24th September 2004. At this meeting, representatives of Member States party to the Convention agreed proposals put forward for the housing and husbandry of fish, amphibians, reptiles, and farm animals. These, together with previously agreed documents for dogs, cats, rodents and rabbits, and non-human primates, and a general section, completed the draft revisions of Appendix A. Some of these documents, together with background supporting information, are available on the web (see details below).

The revised draft texts are compromise documents, and are therefore not perfect. There will be some users, or animal breeders, who will experience greater costs as a result, and some will not be happy with all of the provisions. The revised Appendix does, however, represent a significant step forward in animal welfare for European guidelines and will help us to work towards a common playing field of minimum housing standards so that research in one country is not overly disadvantaged. It is important to realise that it could take some time for the new standards to be implemented. The standards described in Appendix A to the Convention are only recommendations; however, one of the Parties to the Convention is the European Community. Once the Convention is finalised it is understood that the provisions will be adopted unchanged as a revised Annex II to the European Directive 86/609. If this happens, Members of the

European Community will be required to meet the standards within their national legislation.

European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes (ETS 123) Council of Europe (2004). Available at <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=123&CM=8&CL=ENG>

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Farm Animal Welfare Council annual review 2003/2004

The UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), the independent advisory body to the UK Government on matters pertaining to farm animal welfare, recently published its annual review of activities for 2003/2004. Following an introductory message from the Chairwoman, Dr Judy MacArthur Clark, and a brief overview of current members and the remit of the council, the report goes on to detail the work of the Council during the past year.

The first section summarises the advice provided to Government by the Council, focusing primarily on the proposed Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Implementation Plan. Included is an excerpt from a paper produced in January 2004 in which the Council discusses the welfare aims of the plan, what they consider to be a pragmatic approach to welfare, and FAWC's vision of where welfare should be in five years' time. This section also contains details of FAWC's advice on the proposed strategy for veterinary surveillance of animal health and welfare in the UK. The text, which is reproduced in this review, concludes that although FAWC "... supports the principles of more effective veterinary surveillance (both for health and welfare problems) ... [it] has expressed concerns regarding the sufficiency of resources to adequately implement the strategy; the lack of a clear approach to animal welfare surveillance; and the emphasis on exotic diseases to the detriment of endemic diseases and welfare". Finally, this section discusses the FAWC Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing — Part 1: Red Meat Animals, specifically noting the widespread press coverage on the topic of pre-slaughter stunning. However, as the review points out, the report makes many other recommendations that have the capacity to improve welfare, in particular those relating to pre-slaughter handling facilities, slaughter equipment, the training of personnel, and the way in which unconsciousness is induced.

The past year has seen FAWC respond to a number of DEFRA consultations, most of which the reader is referred to the FAWC website to view. Those noted in this review include DEFRA's biosecurity guidance and the European Commission's (EC) proposed changes to current welfare during transport rules.

The final section of the review presents the activities of the various Working Groups, which research and consider advice for discussion and endorsement by the Council. For example, the review reports that the Working Group on Slaughter has begun a study of the welfare of white meat species at slaughter, to accompany its completed study of red meat species. In addition to slaughterhouse visits, literature reviews and stakeholder meetings, the group has also issued a consultation to seek the views of interested parties. The review reports that the Strategy and Communication Working Group has spent much of the year investigating issues relating to good stockmanship, and will make recommendations to Council at the end of 2004, whilst the Markets and Transport Group produced a report on the Welfare of Animals at Markets and Other Gatherings, and has been monitoring the EC's proposed changes to welfare during transport rules, as well as considering the potential welfare problems associated with the electronic identification of livestock. It is reported that 2003/2004 also saw the establishment of a new Working Group on Welfare Labelling with the remit of investigating the extent of welfare labelling for the consumer, including information about the method of production, transport, marketing and slaughter.

The review concludes by outlining the structure of FAWC and how it works, including contact details for those requiring more information about its activities.

Farm Animal Welfare Council Annual Review 2003/2004 (June 2004). Produced and published by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, Area 511, 1A Page Street, London, SW1P 4PQ. 14 pp A4 paperback. Available free of charge from the above address. Also available to download at <http://www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/annualreview.pdf>

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Food and plant imports to the UK: advice to charity workers

On January 1st 2003 the import legislation relating to meat, milk, fish, shellfish and plants was revised, resulting in an effective ban on imports of these foodstuffs and their products from countries outside the European Union (EU). To raise awareness of this change HM Customs and Excise, together with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), has produced two leaflets to highlight these new rules, one concerned with meat and products of animal origin, and the other with plant and plant products. They are intended to raise awareness of the strict controls on bringing meat, milk, fish, shellfish, plants, and their products into EU countries, and are aimed particularly at those who have contact with livestock overseas and who could therefore on their return to the UK unintentionally introduce harmful non-indigenous organisms. Whilst not fully comprehensive, the leaflets do provide an easily accessible summary of the new rules. Those requiring more detailed advice are directed to a number of helplines and websites where further information is available.

The leaflets cite the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak in the UK as an example of how costly animal and plant diseases can be to rural communities, businesses and the economy. However, no mention is made regarding the negative impact that such disease outbreaks can have on animal welfare. This would have been a useful addition to these otherwise useful and informative guides.

If in doubt, leave it out! HM Customs and Excise (May 2004). Two 8-page fold out leaflets, one concerned with meat and animal products, and the other with plants or plant products. Produced and published by HM Customs and Excise. Details of the import allowances and restrictions can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/illegal/allow/allowances.htm>

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