

The welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices: a review of legislation across EU countries

The EU Dog and Cat Alliance (a group of 45 organisations with an interest in cat and dog welfare from 14 of the 28 European Union member states) has published a Report examining provisions for the protection and promotion of dog and cat welfare across the European Union and proposing EU-wide measures to improve welfare for these companion animal species.

Whilst overarching EU legislation governs the welfare of animals used in agriculture and for scientific research and testing, protections for companion species are less comprehensive at the EU level, meaning that individual Member States shoulder the bulk of the responsibility for legislating for dog and cat welfare.

The Report highlights the inevitable disparities which arise when individual countries control welfare legislation. Significant differences in regulations covering a range of issues which affect dog and cat welfare are highlighted, for instance, whilst some countries tightly control registration, breeding or surgical mutilation of cats and dogs, others impose almost no controls on these practices.

The Report makes the case for EU-wide regulation of cat and dog welfare to eliminate such disparities. Given that EU legislation has played a significant role in harmonising the laws and regulations governing the treatment of animals in other fields, an attempt to control the treatment of cats and dogs seems timely. There are pitfalls in EU-wide legislation however, including the potential for ‘regression to the mean’ whereby the standards of those countries which are already higher are eroded, or ‘gold-plating’ whereby some countries impose standards higher than the harmonised EU standards, which can be perceived as restraint of trade between Member States. In general, the proposals from the Alliance propose standards that are as high as or higher than those currently in force in any Member State. The proposals include:

- Compulsory permanent identification and registration of dogs and cats on an appropriate database, which is linked to an EU database;
- Compulsory licensing of dog and cat breeders and harmonised EU standards for dog and cat breeders, covering the conditions in which dogs and cats are kept, training of breeders, socialisation of puppies and kittens and the prevention of selective breeding of dogs and cats with genetic problems as a minimum;
- A ban on the sale of dogs and cats in pet shops, at markets, shows and exhibitions as well as in the street. Dogs and cats should only be sold from their breeder’s premises, allowing new owners to see the conditions in which their pet has been raised;
- Appropriate controls on the internet trade of dogs and cats;
- Specific requirements for the transport of cats and dogs in the context of an economic activity to protect their welfare; and
- A full ban on all surgical mutilations other than for health reasons.

The Welfare of Dogs and Cats Involved in Commercial Practices: a Review of the Legislation across EU Countries (March 2015). A4, 116 pages. EU Dog and Cat Alliance. Available for download from: http://www.dogandcatwelfare.eu/media/filer_public/0b/d2/0bd22b71-f297-4b93-b796-6ff5b245adc8/eudogandcat_web.pdf.

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Food Standards Agency board meeting

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has published a Report by its Chief Operating Officer which discusses the results of a recent series of unannounced inspections of abattoirs across Great Britain — in Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has sole responsibility for animal welfare policy and enforcement. In it, the FSA notes the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) Opinion on CCTV in slaughterhouses and reiterates its commitment to promoting a zero tolerance approach to breaches of animal welfare. This Report also contains a review of consumer attitudes to animal welfare, which shows welfare of farmed animals as the food-related issue of greatest concern to UK consumers.

Following a number of exposés which showed evidence of apparent deliberate cruelty to animals in two British slaughterhouses, the FSA carried out a series of unannounced inspections of GB slaughterhouses. A total of 306 inspections across England, Scotland and Wales were completed by FSA staff during February and March this year. The results of the survey showed that 267 of the premises visited (87%) were operating to satisfactory animal welfare standards, but 38 abattoirs (12%) were in need of improvements in this area. Of these, 33 were in England (11%), two in Scotland and three in Wales. Of the 33 in England, one required urgent improvement.

There are differences in implementation of EU requirements for Animal Welfare Officers (AWOs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) in England, compared to Scotland and Wales, which may be linked to a differing enforcement landscape. Certain businesses in Wales are still in the process of transitioning on SOP requirements. The Report says that the majority of areas of non-compliance have already been identified by the plants’ Official Veterinarians (OVs) and are being addressed. The main problem areas include: the use of SOPs; documentation; monitoring; and the appointment of AWOs. However, no details are given as to the nature of the non-compliances.

The effectiveness of the FSA teams operating in slaughterhouses was also assessed during this round of inspections and was found to be good in 294 (96%) of the premises visited. Twelve of the FSA teams were found wanting in certain aspects of their work; namely record-keeping and clarity in