

## Reports and Comments

Animal Welfare welcomes the submission of items for this Reports and Comments section of the journal. These are accepted for publication at the discretion of the Editorial Office and are not peer-reviewed.

### Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on the Government's draft Animal Welfare Bill

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRACOM) is the body appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the UK's Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated bodies. During the latter half of 2004 the EFRACOM, under the chairmanship of Mr Michael Jack, scrutinised the Government's draft Animal Welfare Bill and produced a report on this in December (see details below).

The Government published the draft Bill in July 2004. The current law is contained in over 20 pieces of legislation and the new Bill aimed to modernise this and provide protection for companion and kept animals including farmed animals. In addition to retaining the existing cruelty offence (based on the existing Protection of Animals Act 1911), the new Bill introduced a new offence of failing to take reasonable steps to ensure an animal's welfare.

In its summary, the Committee fully supports and welcomes the Government's initiative to modernise and improve animal welfare legislation but stated that: "We consider that the draft Bill raises many and often complex issues which must be resolved before a final Bill is presented to Parliament". The Report includes 101 recommendations on these issues.

Among the Committee's concerns were that the Bill would delegate very broad power to the Secretary of State in England and the National Assembly in Wales for subsidiary legislation, that there were unresolved difficulties in deciding which species should be covered (particularly with regard to various invertebrates such as crabs, lobsters and cephalopods), and that there were difficulties also with regard to the enforcement and prosecution provisions in the draft Bill.

The issues do indeed pose complex philosophical and practical challenges. Considering the short time in which it was produced, this is a thorough report and it is likely to be helpful in forging a robust piece of legislation for the future.

**The Draft Animal Welfare Bill: First Report of Session 2004–2005** (December 2004). House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. 134 pp A4 paperback. Published by The House of Commons. Distributed by and available from The Stationery Office Ltd, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN, UK. [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop).

*JK Kirkwood*

*UFAW*

### Categorising the severity of scientific procedures on animals

In many countries, scientific procedures on animals are permissible only if the benefits are judged to outweigh the costs to the welfare of the animals involved. There has been much discussion of how welfare costs can be categorised in this context. In the UK, in applying for licences for work under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, scientists are required to assess the likely welfare cost to the animals involved in terms of severity: mild, moderate, substantial or unclassified. The Boyd Group (a UK forum for open exchange of views on issues of concern related to the use of animals in science) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) jointly organised a series of three focus group meetings on categorising the severity of scientific procedures, the discussions from which were summarised in a report published in July 2004 (see details below).

The three focus group meetings involved three groups: veterinary surgeons and animal care and welfare officers responsible for the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures; representatives of animal welfare and anti-vivisection organisations; and holders of project and personal licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. All three groups agreed that recognising, monitoring and assessing the severity of adverse effects is vital. However, difficulties arise through having to summarise what can be a large description of possible effects on welfare into one of four categories. Arguably it would be better to provide a fuller description of the nature of the risks to welfare with each procedure and project.

The severity categories are used also to provide public information on suffering. All three groups agreed that these data are not useful or appropriate for this purpose because they do not reflect the actual harms to the individual animals involved and do not indicate how or why the animals were used. All three groups agreed that retrospective reporting of the severity of adverse effects would provide the most pertinent information but opinion was divided about whether the effort to collect such data would be justified. The licencees and animal protection groups both suggested and agreed that there would be merit in research to compare predicted versus actual adverse effects.

The contents of the report include: background; the need for a severity categorisation system; the difficulties of the current severity system; suggested practical solutions to these problems; public information about severity; feedback on how the system is working in practice; and references. Reports of the three round-table discussions are included as Appendices. This is a useful contribution to the debate on this important and difficult subject.

**Categorising the severity of scientific procedures on animals** (July 2004). Summary and reports from three round-table discussions. Edited by Jane A Smith and Maggy Jennings on behalf of