

Meeting of the sub-group on poultry

Tenth meeting, 30 January 2023
(Videoconference)

– MINUTES –

Attendance

Independent expert	Leonardo James Vinco Evangelia N. Sossidou
Civil society organisations	Eurogroup for animals (EFA)
Business and professional organisations	AVEC COPA FVE
Member States	Czech Republic Denmark Spain Norway
European Commission	DG SANTE G5
Guest	European Reference Centre for the Welfare of poultry and other small-farmed animals EY (External contractor for IA study on kept animals)

Topic of the meeting: Current legal provisions relevant for the welfare of poultry: screening of current legal provisions relevant for the welfare of poultry (cont. from 9th meeting of the subgroup)

Discussion

The chair welcomed participants and introduced the topic. The exchange concentrated first on Directive 1999/74/EC (laying hens) and afterwards on Directive 98/58/EC (general farming directive).

Members of the subgroup suggested amendments on the directives as follows:

1. Directive 1999/74/EC

Article 1 (scope):

- The size of establishments excluded from the scope of the Directive (less than 350 laying hens) was regarded as too large.
- Only few (basic) requirements should apply for farms in certain regions that are not engaged in trade of the internal market.
- The criteria to consider if establishments fall under the scope of the legislation or not, should not be the size of the establishment but rather whether the animals are kept for commercial or non-commercial purposes.

- The possibility to include in the scope of the new legislation large (zoo) animals was evoked.

Article 2 (definitions):

- Definitions of Directive 2007/43/EC should be kept, and additional definitions should be included in the new legislation. Definitions for “perch”, “cage” and “barn/ aviary/ veranda system” are needed.
- Issues currently dealt with in legislation on marketing standards should be included in the animal welfare legislation - for laying hens but also for other species and categories.

Article 4 (alternative systems):

- The requirement that perches should not be above the littered area should be kept. Additionally, there should be a requirement that perches must be at a good height so that birds must jump onto them from the area they walk on – to jump at least ½ meter. Further, it should be required that one perch should not be above another one to avoid droppings falling on a hen below (increases the risk to start feather pecking).
- It was clarified that in the Netherlands, 50% of the ground floor area is littered (instead of the required one third).
- In addition to the defined maximum stocking density per m² usable area (currently: 9 hens/m²), a maximum number of birds per m² ground floor area should be required (e.g., 18 hens per m² ground floor).
- It should be specified that the maximum number of levels in a multi-tier system include the ground floor.
- The requirement of a floor width of at least 90 cm for inspection purposes should be added.
- “Access” via popholes to a covered veranda and to an outdoor area should be aligned with organic legislation and minimum requirements should be foreseen (e.g., 1m pophole width per 500 hens).
- If the area of a covered veranda is calculated as usable area, a maximum size of the veranda needs to be defined (risk of extreme density at night when the birds are kept only inside). In the Netherlands, the maximum countable area of a veranda is 50% of the inside usable area.
- There should be a requirement for shelter in open runs, a minimum percentage of the open run that needs to be covered and requirements for such cover (e.g., bushes).
- There should be a requirement on the attractivity of outdoor runs (if there is no shelter, hens will not use it) and on the need for training of pullets to use it.

Article 6 (enriched cages):

- Quail need height in their environment since they jump (risk of injury and inability to perform natural behaviour if the height is too low).
- The need of pedigree and great-grandparent breeding companies to use cages was highlighted; there is currently no possibility to achieve breeding goals while keeping the animals in alternative systems., However, so far there has been no discussion on the possibility to use enriched instead of barren cages. For these breeders, it is also necessary to have the possibility of individual keeping.

Annex:

- The requirements should be more specific (e.g., maximum noise level).
- Clarification is needed on who is responsible for what.
- Beak trimming should only be allowed on day 1 and under use of anaesthesia and analgesia.
- Castration of birds should only be allowed under the use of anaesthesia and analgesia (this is currently not done due to costs and time). It was explained that in France, such castration (without of anaesthesia and analgesia) is allowed as from three months of age.

- If rules for mobile housing are foreseen, it should be required that birds must have outside access at daytime and that they are kept inside at night. In addition, a covered veranda in front the mobile housing should be required, and construction and functionality of the housing should be defined.
- It was considered that the current Directive targets large establishments, and that rules on small holdings are needed.

2. Directive 98/58/EC

- In the definitions, it should be clarified that the “owner” means the owner of the animals - not of the building.
- Instead of “sufficient number” of staff, it should be required that there is staff to ensure that the animals are adequately being cared for.
- Artificial intelligence systems should be used only as a helping tool thus in addition to the human caretaker – not replacing the human and physical controls.
- More frequent inspections are needed in case of something is going wrong, in case of on-farm hatching, presence of young poultry, specifically hot or cold days, feather pecking, etc.
- Requirements on light should be very general, focussing on the needs of the animals (they should be able to see each other). When keeping non-beak-trimmed animals, the possibility to dim the light or even to mix with red light must be possible.
- For injured/ sick animals, provision of a separating pen is needed and the possibility to kill the animal. Long term isolation should be avoided in social animals like chickens.
- Animals not kept in buildings shall “always” be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators, and risks to their health – thus “where necessary and possible” should be deleted.
- Requirements on water should include that it is clean, of good quality, safe for the animals and accessible at all times, so that they can choose when and how much to drink.

The members of the subgroup provided some links to information related to covered run areas for laying hens¹, definition of cage/non-cage systems² and specific measurements for laying hens³.

3. Calendar for the next meetings

The eleventh meeting (Wednesday, 10 May 2023, 9:00-12:30, virtual) will be dedicated to the screening of Directive 2007/43/EC and to discussion of the recently adopted EFSA opinions on the welfare on farm of laying hens and of broilers.

The Chair thanked all participants for their constructive contributions.

¹ <https://beterleven.dierenbescherming.nl/zakelijk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Laying-hens-1-star-version-3.1-d.d.-01-09-2016.pdf>

² <https://edepot.wur.nl/532357>

³ <https://edepot.wur.nl/525841>