

Minutes of the first meeting of the Animal Welfare Expert Group

E03594

16 September 2024, Brussels

Introduction

The Commission opened the meeting by explaining that, for the first time, an Expert Group has been established to gather the expertise from the Member States on issues relating to the EU animal welfare legislation and that, for this reason, it was decided to hold the meeting in physical format.

The Commission described the role of the Animal Welfare Expert Group in view of the empowerments for the Commission to lay down more specific common requirements by delegated acts, both in the Commission's proposals on the protection of animals during transport and on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, and in the Official Controls Regulation.

The Commission also explained that the Animal Welfare Expert Group will serve as a forum for exchanges of best practices and information on national rules on animal welfare between Member States and the Commission.

The Commission declared that the presentations made during the meeting will be published on the website of DG SANTE.

1. Adoption of the Rules of Procedures

The Rules of Procedure for the Expert Group were adopted without any modifications to the draft version which had been circulated via AGM on 9 September 2024.

2. Commission activities related to animal welfare

The Commission made a presentation of ongoing animal welfare activities in DG SANTE.

In the discussion that followed, the Member States asked questions about the state of play of the revision of EU animal welfare legislation, about the pilot project and preparatory action related to pig welfare as well as about the distinction between Expert Groups and Working Groups. The Commission provided clarification on these matters.

3. Member States' notifications of national legislation

The Commission presented the relevant legal bases and procedures for Member States to use when notifying their draft and/or adopted national rules on animal welfare to the Commission.

In the discussion that followed, Member States raised questions about the notifications of draft legislation, as well as about the procedure for emergency situations, to which the Commission replied. It was clarified that any draft national legal measure related to animal

welfare must be notified to the Commission under TRIS, independently of whether the scope of the measure is covered by existing EU animal welfare legislation or not, in accordance with the Directive (EU) 2015/1535.

4. New national welfare requirement

The representative from Finland made a presentation of the recent changes to the Finnish legislation on animal welfare, which for instance contains a ban on the surgical castration of piglets that will become applicable in 2035.

In the discussion that followed, other Member States referred to issues such as rules on ritual slaughter, import of dogs and cats and sanctions.

The Commission thanked Finland for the presentations, and the other Member States for their interventions, and expressed its hope that information about new national animal welfare requirements could become a recurring item on the agenda of the Expert Group's meetings.

5. Animal Welfare Network and Pet Animals Network in iRASFF

The Commission presented the Pet Animals' Network and the (newly established) Animal Welfare Network in iRASFF and explained their role for exchanges between Member States in the implementation of current legislation, as foreseen under the Official Controls Regulation. The Commission also informed about the publication of its 2023 Annual Report for the Alert and Cooperation Network (https://food.ec.europa.eu/safety/acn/reports-and-publications_en).

Member States asked about the inter-relationship between Pet Animals' Network and the Animal Welfare Network, to which the Commission provided clarification. One Member State suggested that a more coherent approach by Member States of their iRASFF notifications should be encouraged, since their content is currently very shifting and often quite vague. In reaction, the Commission stated that this Expert Group could be used to further discuss this and to improve the situation.

6. European Citizens' Initiative "Fur Free Europe": planned survey to Member States in the context of the Commission's assessment

Further to the Commission's reply to the ECI "Fur Free Europe", which foresees that the Commission carries out an impact assessment, more data is needed. For that reason, a survey will be sent to the Member States, with a deadline to reply in January 2025. Some examples from the draft questionnaire were presented by the Commission at the meeting.

In the discussion that followed, the Member States raised issues related to the scope and timeframe of the survey, to which the Commission replied.

7. Next meeting

The Commission declared its intention to hold the next meeting of the Animal Welfare Expert Group in March 2025.