



EU Platform on Animal Welfare

13th meeting

WebEx video conference

DAY 1: Thursday, 15 June 2023, 14.00 – 18.10 CET, Brussels time

The meeting was web streamed. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

– SUMMARY REPORT –

The 13th meeting of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare provided the opportunity to update the Platform members on the state of play of the revision of the EU animal welfare legislation, including on data collected for the impact assessment. In addition, participants were informed on the work performed since the last meeting by the six thematic subgroups of the Platform, established in March 2022 to support the revision. Experts from the voluntary initiative on the welfare of equids and dogs and cats presented their opinions aimed to help the Commission consider legal provisions for these animals. The agenda of the meeting also included the presentations of four EFSA scientific opinions, on the welfare of laying hens and broilers on farm; on ducks, geese and quails; on calves and on dairy cows, requested by the Commission in the context of the legislative review to update scientific knowledge. Among other initiatives set out by the Commission relevant for animal welfare and the sustainability of food production, the meeting saw the presentation of the "Overview report on the protection of the welfare of laying hens at all stages of production", the trade dimension in the context of the revision of animal welfare legislation and the EU Coordinated control action on illegal trade of cats and dogs. Furthermore, the Platform members were informed of the European Court of Auditors' report "Transport of live animals in the EU: challenges and opportunities". As always, the meeting allowed members the discussion on the challenges to be addressed in the future animal welfare legislation with the reactions from Member States, NGOs, professional organisations, and independent experts.

OPENING

CHAIR: Claire Bury, Deputy Director General for Food sustainability, DG SANTE

Opening by Chair Claire Bury, Deputy Director General for Food Sustainability, DG SANTE

The Chair presented the agenda, including the point on the European Citizens' Initiative on banning fur in the EU – 'ECI Fur Free Europe' under 'AOB' of the first day. The [agenda](#) was adopted.

State of play of the revision of the EU animal welfare legislation and overview of data collected for the impact assessment

Andrea Gavinelli, Head of unit 'Animal welfare', updated the Members on the status of the review of animal welfare legislation since the last Platform meeting. He informed that all external supporting studies have been completed and economic models to better assess impacts on food security and affordability as well as competitiveness have been run (with the help of the Joint Research Centre). The draft impact assessment was discussed with the Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) on 10 May. The RSB asked for a more in depth-analysis of the costs and benefits of the respective policy options, greater use of the Fitness Check findings and a more systematic presentation of the views expressed by stakeholders. The revised version of the draft impact assessment is planned to be resubmit to the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in the days to come. The Commission expects its legislative proposals to be adopted in the autumn. Mr Gavinelli expressed his gratitude to the Members of the Platform and its subgroups, who provided the Commission with a very useful contribution with practical and experienced points of view.

Questions & Answers

- **Belgium** expressed the hope that the resubmission of the impact assessment to the RSB would not delay the adoption of the legislative proposal. As the future EU Presidency, Belgium will be ready to work on the proposal as from January 2024, including putting in place staff to deal with the task.

The Chair said the Commission is working as intensely as possible to meet the requirements of the RSB and hopes to see the proposal adopted in the autumn.

- **COPA** expressed concerns about social and economic impact of the future legislation. According to the study commissioned by Copa,¹ the need for more space for animals will lead to reduced production and in consequence to increase of imported food produced with no respect of animal welfare standards.

The Chair thanked Copa for its work in collecting impact data and sharing it with the Commission.

- **Eurogroup for Animals**, on the necessary investments to be made by farmers, stressed that a distinction should be made between investments aimed at improving animal welfare standards and the current ones, which could be even higher. Raising animal welfare standards should not be beneficial only for animals but also for farmers in term of income.²
- **European Meat Network** pointed out that the main problem with the current animal welfare legislation is the lack of harmonised enforcement across Member States, the biggest challenge from an industry perspective, and asked if the Commission had included the cost and a roadmap for improvement in this area in its impact assessment.

The Chair agreed that the lack of harmonised rules across the EU can harmed the internal market and be costly for industry. It has been addressed by the impact assessment.

¹Assessment of the impacts of phasing out cages in EU livestock farming:
<https://copa-cogeca.eu/publications>

² For more on the benefits of animal welfare revisions to social, human, and environmental impacts:
<https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/library/external-costs-animal-sourced-foods-eu>

- **CIWF** said that there is a need to not only look at the cost of improving animal welfare standards, but also at the benefits for society and the planet.

The Chair said that the Commission looks also at benefits that are sometimes more difficult to monetize but need certainly to be considered.

- **AVEC**, in support to Copa, pointed out that 25% of chicken breast filets consumed in the EU comes from the third countries. So, the guarantee of applying the same animal welfare conditions along the food chain is needed to protect the sector.
- **Linda Keeling** expressed her satisfaction to see that the great amount of the research produced over the last decades had been incorporated in the revised legislation. She asked about the future data collection and areas of research to be needed for the impact assessment under the new legislation, e.g., epidemiology data and underlined the importance of a harmonised enforcement.
- **Virginie Michel** (online) supported Linda on the importance of monitoring and harmonised implementation of the new legislation.

The Commission answered that a possibility to collect more data and indicators (animal-based indicators as well as policy indicators) has been foreseen in the impact assessment. This should stimulate research.

- **Denmark** said it looked forward to an ambitious new legislation covering all animal species kept for economic purpose to be passed in September. In this context, it pointed out the need for specific legislation for each type of fish species and wondered whether EFSA's opinions on fish could be issued sooner than scheduled. It also emphasised the importance of establishing the EU Reference Centre for aquatic animals.

The Commission informed that its ambition is to propose an evolutionary legislation in which new EFSA scientific opinions could be integrated when available. In some parts of the new legislation, the provisions on fish would already be implemented (e.g., on killing). The new legislative approach would make possible to address some aspects of the internal market harmful for the welfare of animals, like in the case of dogs and cats.

Presentation of the 'Overview report on the protection of the welfare of laying hens at all stages of production' [PP]

A policy officer from unit 'Animals', presented the outcome of a project undertaken in 2021 which assessed official controls linked to the protection of the welfare of laying hens at all the stages of production. Audits were carried out in nine Member States and questionnaires were sent to another sixteen, providing an overview of such controls and highlighting good practices while also identifying common challenges faced in the sector. The report concluded that current national official controls ensure the overall implementation of EU requirements in Member States. The report³ identified that the absence of specific welfare requirements for younger hens (chicks and pullets) leads to low number of welfare controls in hatcheries and pullet farms.

³ The full report can be found at: <https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit-report>

Questions & Answers

- **Bas Rodenburg**, on the differences between Member States concerning the issue of beak trimming, informed that based on the results of the “Best Practice Hens” project⁴, this is linked to the use of the cage-free system. A two-step process could be observed: first transition to cage-free rearing, then transition to intact beaks when experience with the cage-free system has been gained.
- **HSI** stated that the killing of one day old male chicks is totally unacceptable from an ethical point of view and wondered if the cost is the main obstacle to banning this practice in the EU.
- **CIWF** pointed out that one of the main weaknesses of official controls comes from the method of calculating the maximum stocking density. The Member States rely, without checking, on the declarations of the operators who often overestimate the maximum stocking capacity. CIWF wondered how the Commission would tackle this problem.
- **Four Paws** observed that pullets and breeders are a little bit neglected in the current legislation and wondered if there were elements in the proposal to fill this gap.
- **Evangelia Sossidou** asked for more information on the types of verandas.
- **Welfarm** wanted to know more about the Commission’s opinion on the new technology to identify the sex of chicks at a very early stage and the recommended date to carry out the identification, the percentage of gassed and macerated chicks in the EU and the situation in the Member States regarding access to verandas and its definition.

The Commission, on stocking density, informed that the Competent Authorities in the Member States rely on the farmers’ declaration but carry out regular official controls to verify the data, knowing that this is the most frequent non-compliance. Concerning the verandas, they are considered as an extension of a barn with an overhead roofing but also open access to the outdoor space. About male chicks, most Member States only allow the use of gaz, but the Commission does not have precise data because it is not required to report on this aspect. The related costs depend on the size of the industry and are mostly technology costs. The issue is mainly a policy question that is included in the impact assessment and discussed with the Member States.

The trade dimension in the context of the animal welfare revision

Zoltán Somogyi, Head of Unit ‘Multilateral international relations’, presented the main outlines of the Commission report⁵, published last year, containing an assessment of the rationale and legal feasibility of applying EU health and environmental standards for import into the EU. He informed that there are no horizontal provisions in EU law referring to environmental or sustainability requirements applicable to domestic or imported food products. Current legislation regarding the animal welfare conditions at import is related only to more humane conditions at slaughtering and, to some limited extent, to better animal welfare at transport. The legal framework does not require equivalent measures for the welfare of farmed animals to be applied before the entry into the EU. With the revised animal welfare legislation, the Commission would consider, as one of the options, the introduction of rules requiring that imported products were obtained under conditions that are

⁴ <https://bestpracticehens.eu/>

⁵ “Application of EU health and environmental standards to imported agricultural and agri-food products”: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0226>

equivalent to the EU's animal welfare rules for on farm welfare, or some of them (either focusing on the housing conditions or covering more animal welfare criteria such as mutilations), in compliance with WTO rules; or, as an alternative option, a labelling requirement also for imported products. The equivalent conditions currently in force for slaughter and on transport would continue to be applicable. The concept of 'public morals' has been used in a trade context to include animal welfare.

Questions & Answers

- **WAP** said that people in countries like China or Brazil see the EU as a sustainability leader which, with its EU Green Deal and its efforts to raise animal welfare standards, sets a good example to the world.
- **The Netherlands** wondered if there will be a transition period for products imported from third countries regarding compliance with animal welfare standards.
- **COPA**, in relation to third countries, pointed out the risk that only certain farms there exporting to the EU comply with the animal welfare standards. Therefore, the respect of mirror clauses would be very important. In addition, it wondered about the impact on import of the Mercosur agreement.
- **HSI** asked about the possible length of the transition period for products imported from third countries and the importance of public moral concern for animal welfare in the WTO's negotiations.
- **Vier Pfoten** pointed out that the export of food products to Europe is mainly done by large companies with the capacities to adapt to EU animal welfare rules. Also, those outside the EU who have already adopted different animal welfare measures could support the EU in the WTO's negotiations (e.g., California which has banned cages).
- **Animal Health Europe** observed that outdoor keeping is often presented as offering the highest animal welfare level, but farmers are keeping birds indoors due to the risk of avian influenza. Vaccination could be the solution to the problem, but farmers are unwilling to use it because trading partners don't like it. It wondered how this issue could be solved by future animal welfare legislation.
- **FEAP** (on chat) informed that currently over 75% of the EU seafood needs is imported, of which more than 50% is produced on farms. Since certain of the imported species (such tilapia and pangasius) are not raised in the EU, future EU legislation won't apply to them.

The Commission said that certain animal welfare measures could have an impact on humane health or the environment and could therefore be used as arguments in WTO negotiations. However, the type of arguments to use will depend on the measures we wish to introduce but also on the opinion of the WTO panel. Important to point out that for the first time, at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2022, ministers adopted the "*Sanitary and Phytosanitary Declaration: Responding to Modern SPS Challenges*"⁶ in an effort to better manage emerging challenges related to international trade in food, animals and plants. However, it's difficult to predict the impact of this declaration on adoption of the new rules.

⁶ <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/MIN22/27.pdf&Open=True>

Regarding vaccine, the Chair said that it has been agreed upon by all parties involved after several discussions, that avian flu vaccination is not currently necessary but that it is still advisable to be ready in case things change.

AFTERNOON SESSION

CHAIR: Head of Unit 'Animal Welfare', Directorate Crisis preparedness in Food, Animals and Plants, DG SANTE

Presentation of EFSA opinion on the welfare of laying hens and broilers on farm [PP] & [PP]

EFSA policy officers presented the scientific opinion on the protection of domestic fowl related to the production of eggs including the different phases of the production cycle: laying hen breeders, chicks and pullets before they become laying hens and laying hens during the production of eggs. To improve the welfare of farmed broiler chickens and laying hens, EFSA recommends avoiding the practice of mutilation, feed restriction and the use of cages. The two scientific opinions include advice on space, density of animals, lighting, dust, noise, litter and structures such as elevated platforms. They provide a scientific basis to support the ongoing revision of the EU animal welfare legislation.

Questions & Answers

- **ELPHA** (online) asked for an explanation of the good results of the problem of footpad dermatitis in Denmark, despite the average stocking density around 39 kg/m².
- **CIWF** asked about the correlation between keel bones fractures and selective breeding.
- **COGECA** wanted to have more information about positive behaviour resulting from increased area per chicken and on possible measures to be implemented in the outdoor system to protect animals from predators.
- **Evangelia Sossidou** wondered if the term “comfort” covers only thermal comfort or also dust baths and stressed that the issue of animal health indicators is underestimated.
- **AVEC** informed that according to a study by Wageningen University, the problem of footpad lesions is more related to flock management than stocking density. On the link between footpad dermatitis and stocking density, expressed disappointment that the data collected by the sector had not been considered.
- **Eurogroup** underlined the importance of positive animal welfare indicators and asked for more information on the sovereign breeds.
- **EFFAB** asked for the clarification on mutilations at the breeding level and the procedure used because broilers breeding can contribute to good animal welfare.
- **Ireland** pointed out that a detailed recommendation is needed on the arrangement of perches for laying hens as this is an important element of hen welfare.
- **The Netherlands** informed that their broiler production for home consumption has already shifted to a lower stocking density and a positive impact on broiler health has followed (e.g., lower use of antibiotics).
- **Denmark** informed that it would introduce a ban on cages for laying hens and pullets as from 1 July this year.

In its answers EFSA informed that footpad dermatitis depends not only on stocking density but also on other factors, such as litter and management of the flock. The Expert Knowledge Elicitation (EKE) method was used to assess all elements. Comfort behaviour includes activities like forging or dust bath. The EFSA opinion focused on welfare but of course the issue of health and health indicators is very important. For broilers and laying hens, animal-based measures at slaughterhouse were addressed, as requested in the mandate, as well as the issue of perches and slow growing breeds.

Subgroup on the welfare of poultry [PP]

The Chair of the subgroup informed that the two meetings held this year were devoted to the screening of the current legislation on laying hens (Council Directive 1999/74/EC), on broilers (Council Directive 2007/43/EC) and on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (Council Directive 98/58/EC), as well as to the considerations of the recommendations given in the recent EFSA opinions. The last meeting of the group, in July, will concentrate on the EFSA opinion on the welfare of ducks, geese and quail.

Presentation of EFSA opinion on the welfare of ducks, geese and quails [PP]

An EFSA policy officer informed that its scientific opinion, issued in May 2023, recommends avoiding the use of cages, for ducks, geese and quail. It provides recommendations on qualitative and quantitative criteria to prevent the negative welfare consequences in relation to space allowance, size of the group, nesting facilities, adequate enrichment and foraging material and access to an outdoor area/veranda.

Questions & Answers

- HSI, on the production of foie gras, observed that the term “force-feeding” should be used, instead of “overfeeding”. It also pointed out that alternative methods of producing foie gras are impeded by the minimum liver requirement in the EU marketing standards for poultry. It therefore considered it necessary to get rid of this requirement and the revision of EU marketing standards offers a good opportunity to do so.
- Paul Llonch Obiols asked if there were limitations in gathering additional scientific knowledge to further improve the welfare of minor species such as ducks, geese and quails.
- Eurogroup wanted to know if the subgroup discussed the stocking density considering the EFSA recommendation in this regard.

In its answers EFSA confirmed that the data on minor species is quite limited, which was highlighted in the report and that is why the opinion is quite general. The Commission informed that the subgroup didn't discuss the stocking density recommended by EFSA.

Subgroup on animal welfare labelling [PP]

A policy officer from unit “Animal welfare” informed that since the last Platform meeting, the subgroup met twice. In December 2022, key criteria across species were discussed and an agreement was reached on the establishment of a ‘baseline’ of common practices and not on animal welfare domains. The last meeting in January this year, saw three presentations by Eurocommerce on the polarisation of the consumer demand, “Haltungformsystem” in Germany and good practices in Portugal.

Subgroup on the protection of animals during transport [PP]

A policy officer from unit “Animal welfare”, co-chair of the subgroup, informed that during the March 2023 meeting, the only one since the last meeting of the Platform, the discussion was devoted to economic activity, policy indicators and journey logs. For the first subject, an agreement was reached on the need for a definition and better clarity of this concept in the new legislation. The lack of indicators in the current legislation was considered as a weak point and the need for a harmonised approach for indicators and journey logs in the new legislation was underlined.

European Court of Auditors' report ‘Transport of live animals in the EU: challenges and opportunities’ [PP]

Michela Lanzutti, Senior Auditor, presented the main outcomes of the report which investigate factors surrounding the transport of billions of live animals transported by road, sea, rail, and air within, and to and from the EU, for a number of reasons, such as breeding, fattening or slaughter. According to the findings of the report, future challenges and opportunities lie in identifying alternatives to live animal transport, providing better information to consumers, promoting structural changes towards a more sustainable food supply chain, assigning monetary value to animal suffering, and incorporating it into transport costs and meat prices, and promoting the use of new technologies.

Questions & Answers

- Cogeca highlighted the need to improve the emergency service when transporting live animals and to better support drivers.
- Animal Welfare Foundation wondered how the Commission would tackle the transport of animals by sea, which is problematic not only because of animal welfare, but also of its negative consequences for the environment.
- CELCAA wanted to know why animal transport is considered synonymous with animal suffering.

The Commission agreed with Cogeca that there is a room for improvement regarding contingency planning and emergencies. Regarding maritime transport, the Commission is aware of the major challenges in this respect. This is why it passed tertiary legislation even before the new legislative proposal.

To the question of CELCAA, Michela Lanzutti replied that even if all the conditions aimed to ensure animal welfare during transport are met, stress for the animals remains, even though it is of a different degree depending on the transport conditions. Moreover, always when an animal is moved out of its environment and put in a new environment with unknown congeners, it generates a stress for the animal.

Voluntary initiative on the welfare of equids [PP]

Joe Collins, chair of the initiative, informed that currently the key priority area of work of the group, under the reviewed Terms of Reference, is to provide expertise and support to the Commission on requirements that should be included in legislation relevant to equine welfare, including transport, slaughter and the keeping of animals. He pointed out that regardless of the use or purpose there must be minimum acceptable standards for all domesticated equids and that all ‘kept’ equids have essential/base-line welfare needs that must be provided for.

AOB [PP]

Eurogroup, in the name of the organisers of the European Citizens' Initiative “Fur Free Europe”, which calls on the EU to ban fur farms and ban farmed fur products from the European market, informed that the initiative has reached 1.5 million signatures across the EU and has been officially submitted to the Commission as a successful initiative. Within six months of the publication of the initiative and following the public hearing in the European Parliament, the Commission should set out in a Communication its legal and political conclusions on the initiative and the action it intends to take, if any, and its reasons for taking or not taking action.

In reaction to the presentation of the ECI, **Cogeca** informed of a European project on the welfare of fur animals which should be presented to counterbalance the ECI video. Cogeca proposed to include an item on fur animals on the agenda of the next Platform meeting.

The Chair agreed with the request of Cogeca.

DAY 2: Friday, 16 June 2023, 09.30 – 12.50 CET, Brussels time

The meeting was web streamed. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

MORNING SESSION

CHAIR: Head of Unit ‘Animal Welfare’, Directorate Crisis preparedness in Food, Animals and Plants, DG SANTE

Presentation of EFSA scientific opinion on the welfare of calves [PP]

An **EFSA policy officer** presented the main findings of the opinion on the welfare of calves, issued in March 2023, requested by the Commission in the framework of the Farm to Fork strategy. Three specific issues were investigated: 1) welfare of calves reared for white veal (including requirements for space, group housing and iron intake), 2) risk of limited contact between mother and calf, 3) type of indicators to be used in slaughterhouses to monitor the welfare on farm. According to the opinion, to improve the welfare of farmed calves, the animals should be kept in small groups with sufficient space to rest and given deformable bedding, while the use of individual pens should be avoided.

Questions & Answers

- **FEFAC** asked for more information on cross-sucking after removal of individual pens and the recommended level of the neutral detergent fibre (NDF).
- **Cogeca** asked if EFSA had analysed the negative consequences for cows of the increase in surface area. It pointed out that the frequent rotation of calves between groups not only increases stress, but also the risk of injury and mutual killing of animals due to the dominance instinct.
- **CIWF** wondered if from a welfare point of view, it would not be better to keep calf-cow together during the entire pre-weaning period.
- **FESSAS** observed that in a previous EFSA report the recommendation for cow-calf separation was different and asked for clarification on the recommendation of 20 m² per animal to allow for full locomotor play behaviour.
- **Slow Food** asked for more information on the space allowance.

- **Ireland** pointed out the increased exposition to diseases in relation to the prolonged calf-cow contact in closed environment.

EFSA informed that cross-sucking is a stereotypic behaviour to be prevented by giving enough milk and fibre. The level of the NDF was defined by an experimental study that examined rumination activity with different types of diets. EFSA stressed the importance of maintaining group stability for avoiding aggressions and recommend increasing the current minimum space allowance (1.8 m² per animal) to at least 3 m² per animal to increase time spent lying in a relaxed posture and likely an increase in general activity. The results of several studies have highlighted the missing link between prolonged calf-cow contact and tuberculosis. Therefore, a separation by itself is not a sufficient solution to avoid disease, several other factors play an important role in maintaining good health.

Subgroup on the welfare of calves and dairy cows [PP]

A **policy officer from unit “Animal welfare”**, chair of the subgroup, informed that the group held four meetings since December to discuss the following subjects: animal welfare indicators; health management of dairy cows; cattle breeding, feeding management of fattening calves, Cow Calf Contact systems; EFSA opinion.

Presentation of EFSA scientific opinion on the welfare of dairy cows [PP]

EFSA **policy officer** presented its scientific opinion, adopted in May 2023, on the welfare of dairy cows, which includes cows which have had a calf, pregnant heifers in the last third of gestation and dairy as well as dual purpose breeds. The opinion provides the assessments of housing systems as well as specific hazards for the welfare of dairy cows; selected welfare consequences and their prevalence in different housing systems and analysis of farm characteristics suitable to identify farms at risk of poor dairy cow welfare.

Questions and Answers

- **FEFAC** asked if the iceberg indicators are officially recommended by the subgroups.
- **Animals’ Angels** wanted to know the subgroup’s recommendation on the keeping the tie stalls.
- **EFFAB** asked for clarification on the difficulty of using breeding data to assess animal welfare. It also noted that the subgroup’s statement that legislating on a single trait could lead to unbalanced breeding can be extended to all farmed and aquaculture species.
- **CIWF** asked for more information on the link between selective breeding of high milk yielding cows and health problems such as mastitis or lameness.
- **Eurogroup** asked why tethering is not included in the list of risk factors to be checked when visiting the farm.
- **Copa** stressed that an invited expert’s opinion cannot be used as the basis for a legislative requirement. Much more practice-based evidence is needed.

The **Commission** informed that the subgroup didn’t make formal recommendations, including on iceberg indicators or untethered period in tie-stalls around calving. This varies between farms.

EFSA, on selective breeding, said that this subject was not part of the mandate, therefore it was not analysed in detail. As for tethering, it is not as a characteristic of breeding because EFSA does not recommend tie-stalls.

Best practices to increase the welfare of dairy calves, heifers, cows and end-of-career animals in the EU: the CARE4DAIRY Project [\[PP\]](#)

Silvia D'Albenzio and Birgitta Staaf Larsson presented the CARE4DAIRY project aimed to establish best practices regarding the welfare of dairy heifers, cows and calves, including the treatment of end-of-career dairy cows, and ensure a wide dissemination of the information collected in the best practices through the development of communication materials and the organisation of events. The results of the project will align with recent scientific knowledge and facilitate the implementation of the future revision of EU legislation.

Questions and Answers

- **Ireland** asked how the evaluation of the impact of the project would be done and pointed out that distributing leaflets or posting information on the website often does not change farming practices and therefore does not improve animal welfare.

Silvia D'Albenzio answered that the EU Reference Centre for ruminants and equines will assure the dissemination of the results of the project, among other through the interactive CARE4DAIRY app.

- **FESSAS** pointed out that several Member States already have dairy cows' guidelines and that farmers have implemented changes. Therefore, what more could they improve based on the results of the project.

Birgitta Staaf Larsson replied that the CARE4DAIRY project will provide practical advice to farmers on how to implement the changes.

Update on the work of the voluntary initiative on surgical castration of piglets [\[PP\]](#)

Gé Backus, chair of the initiative, informed of the work on ending piglet castration carried out by the group in last four meetings. The group discussed among others the second progress report on ending castration; protocols for using analgesia and anesthesia and an on-line rapid instrumental method for boar taint detection. One of the conclusions is that only supply chain wide solutions will really work to stop piglet castration.

Subgroup on the welfare of pigs [\[PP\]](#)

A policy officer from unit "Animal welfare", chair of the subgroup, informed that at the three meetings held by the group since December, the following issues have been discussed: space allowances and floors for gilts and sows, piglets, boars and particular cases; genetic selection in pig production and specific questions (e.g., tail docking, enrichment, space allowances).

Questions & Answers

- **COPA** stressed the importance of the fact that raising entire males and immuno-castration could reduce the carbon footprint. Therefore, it complies with the regulatory framework for the prevention and control of industrial emissions based on the best available techniques (BAT). On "zero confinement", pointed out that for insemination and farrowing, the possibility of confinement is necessary to avoid risk for farmers but also fights between sows. In this context, free access stalls are very useful.

- **Finland** informed of its decision to phase out immunocastration with a transition period until January 2025.
- **Ireland** asked if the subgroup considered the slurry rate for sows and piglets.
- **Welfarm** asked why immunocastration is still considered as a complex issue; if biological solution could be considered and if the subgroup discussed the tail docking non-compliance.
- **The Netherlands** emphasised the need to stop immunocastration.
- **EFFAB** observed that the EFSA opinion only mentions immunocastration as a solution to avoid boar taint but not the possibility of keeping the entire male pigs and asked whether the Commission will propose this solution in the new legislation. It underlined the importance of balance breeding and asked if EFSA analysed the question of functional teeth.
- **EMN** pointed out that when introducing a ban on castration, organic farming should not be forgotten.
- **COGECA** observed that organic farming will not accept immunocastration.

Gé Backus answered that immunocastration is still a complex issue because of the need to build a trust of consumers and market acceptance that the meat is safe for consumption. For acceptance by the public it might be better to call it “vaccination” rather than immunocastration.

The Commission answered that “zero confinement” is already applied and no notifications were received about the safety concerns. Free access stalls are a complex issue, their safety and positive animal welfare effects depend on the quality of their construction. The subgroup did not discuss the appropriate slurry rate as EFSA provided a recommendation on this. The controls of compliance with the tail docking regulation are of the responsibility of the Member States.

EFSA added that the keeping the entire male pigs was addressed in its opinion, but the implementation of this solution requires some additional conditions. The issue of functional teeth was also analysed but the research on this should continue.

EU Coordinated control action on illegal trade of cats and dogs [PP]

A data analyst from unit “Food hygiene, Feed and Fraud” presented a one-year EU control action to tackle the illegal trade of pets, in response to increasing reports of illegal activity from Member States. The action aimed at protecting animal and public health by detecting irregularities and falsification of the official documents (passports, health certificates); identifying animal trade disguised as non-commercial movements and deterring fraudsters involved (breeders, transporters, veterinarians and dealers). The action, coordinated by the EU Agri-Food Fraud Network, started in July 2022 and its results will be available in the autumn 2023.

Questions & Answers

- **Vier Pforten** expressed its gratitude for having had the possibility to present its experience during the two workshops organised within the framework of this action and its expectation that the results will help effectively to fight against the illegal pet trade. It underlined the need for a harmonized database for dogs and cats with guaranteed interoperability.
- **Animal Health Europe** wondered why there is a big discrepancy in reporting between countries and what are the main obstacles in fighting the illegal pet trade.

The speaker answered that the action is on a voluntary basis, therefore not all Member States participate in it and that countries have different priorities as to the allocation of resources.

The Commission said that the action report will provide information on the tools needed to tackle the illegal trade in dogs and cats.

Before the next presentation, the Commission thanked the Chair of the voluntary initiative on pets, the FVE and the Eurogroup for the secretarial support and all the Members for their intensive work and the very useful contribution provided to the Commission in its drafting exercise.

Work of the voluntary initiative on the health and welfare of pets (dogs) in trade to support the work of the Commission proposals [PP]

The Netherlands, chair of the group, informed that since May 2022, under a new mandate, the group provided the Commission with existing scientific and technical evidence on possible elements of future EU legislation in the field of transport, breeding (including extreme selective breeding) and raising, as well as marketing and sales of dogs and cats, including minimum standards for advertisers.

Questions & Answers

- Eurogroup expressed the hope that there will be no exception in the rules for extreme dog breeding and informed that a report on this will be published soon. Asked how the recommendations of the initiative will relate to EFSA's mandate on dogs and cats.
- Joe Collins observed that the work of the dog initiative mirrors that of the equine group. Asked about the group's considerations on certifying commercial breeders of dogs and cats, whether it should be time limited and/or linked with legislation.
- Vier Pfoeten, regarding online sales, said that no matter what information is included in an advertisement, if it is not verified, it cannot offer consumers a guarantee. Therefore, a seller verification must be used and Vier Pfoeten could help with this issue.
- HSI asked if the issue of crossbreeding non-domestic cats has been addressed by the initiative.

The Chair of the voluntary initiative informed that the group didn't make a recommendation on the certification time-limit for the breeders. Regarding the verification system (identification and registration), indeed it would be essential that a buyer could check the information in a database. The group didn't discuss the crossbreeding non-domestic cats.

The Commission stressed that the voluntary initiative had done important work in revealing the knowledge gaps on dogs and cats and that the Commission would continue the work on these animals in cooperation with EFSA who has been asked for a technical assistance on dogs and cats. On the certification of commercial breeders, nothing has been decided yet. As to the verification of sellers, everything must be done in cooperation with online selling platforms.

AOB

- COGECA made a request for giving an opportunity of presenting the "Welfare Standards for fur farmed animals" (Welfur) project and giving the floor to fur producers at the next Platform meeting.
- Answering to WOAH's question, the Commission informed that all questions that could not be asked during the meeting, as well as requests for making a presentation at the next meeting, can be sent to the Platform's mailbox.

- **HSI** informed that the meeting of the voluntary initiative on globalisation will take place right after the Platform meeting.
- **Vier Pfoten**, in relation to the request by Cogeca on the fur farmed animals, considered that it is impossible to talk about animal welfare in this context.
- **EFFAB** asked if there will be a meeting devoted to the presentation of the new legislative proposal.

The Commission informed that EFSA has been asked for technical assistance on dogs and cats.

EFSA said that the document on the specific aspects of breeding of cats and dogs will indeed be shorter than an opinion and will be adopted by a working group only and not by a panel, as is the case for an opinion. It will be submitted to the Commission at the end of July and published at the beginning of September.

Conclusions and closing of the meeting

In closing the meeting, **the Chair** thanked all members for their active participation and the animal welfare staff for the organisation of the meeting.

Annex: List of participants