



## Factual summary of the call for evidence of the evaluation of the Animal Health Law

**Disclaimer:** *The document should be regarded solely as a summary of the contributions made by stakeholders to the call for evidence on the evaluation of the Animal Health Law. It cannot in any circumstances be regarded as the official position of the Commission or its services. Responses to the consultation activities cannot be considered as a representative sample of the views of the EU population.*

## 1. Context and objectives of the consultation

This call for evidence was conducted to support the evaluation of the Animal Health Law (AHL) by the European Commission. The AHL<sup>1</sup> provides a single framework establishing principles and rules to prevent and control diseases in animals kept by humans, wild animals and animal products in the EU. The objective of the evaluation is to collect insights into how the AHL is functioning and assess against five evaluation criteria – effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU-added value.

This call for evidence is one of several stakeholder consultation activities contributing to the evaluation. It was published on the Commission's Have Your Say portal<sup>2</sup> and was open for a period of four weeks between 06 March 2024 and 03 April 2024. The consultation targeted the general public and a broad range of stakeholder groups.

The call for evidence gathered opinions and evidence on the key elements of the AHL, such as the law's functioning, its impacts, and other relevant information. Respondents were specifically encouraged to provide their input on opportunities to reduce the administrative burden for stakeholders and suggest potential simplifications. This emphasis may have introduced a bias in the responses, as stakeholders were more likely to focus on areas needing improvement rather than on successes and achievements.

## 2. Overview of respondents

A total of 942 responses were submitted. In line with the Better Regulation Toolbox, 369 replies were excluded from the analysis as they were considered either duplicates (61 responses) or part of an organised campaign<sup>3</sup> (308 responses). Please refer to 8 for further information regarding the campaigns. After the screening, 573 valid responses remained for analysis.

Most contributions to this call for evidence came from respondents identifying as EU citizens (75 %) and one non-EU citizen respondent. The remaining 25 % of responses were identified as organisations. Among these, the majority were non-governmental organisations (26 %), followed by business associations (18 %), public authorities (13 %), companies and businesses (7 %), and academic and research institutions (2 %). Consumer organisations, trade unions, and environmental organisations each represented 1 %. The remaining 32 % include other types of organisations such as veterinary associations and breeding associations. (See Figure 1).

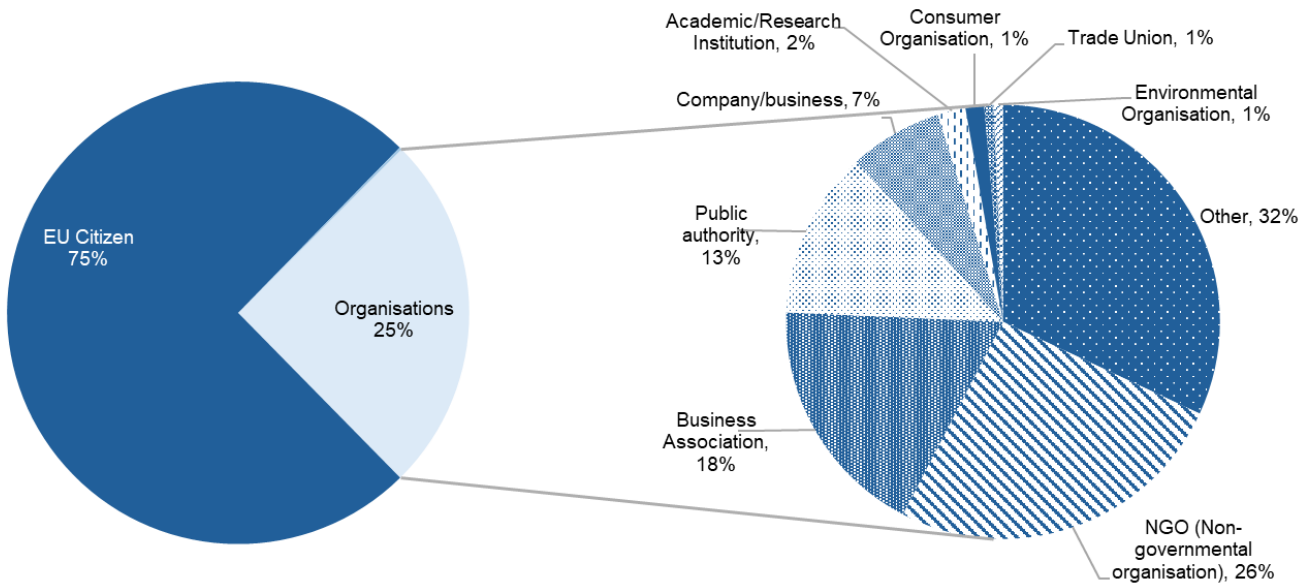
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<sup>1</sup> See [https://food.ec.europa.eu/animals/animal-health/animal-health-law\\_en](https://food.ec.europa.eu/animals/animal-health/animal-health-law_en)

<sup>2</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14036-Animal-Health-Law-evaluation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14036-Animal-Health-Law-evaluation_en)

<sup>3</sup> As per the Better Regulation toolbox, the minimum threshold should be 10 or more identical responses (across all the closed questions) to count as a 'Campaign'

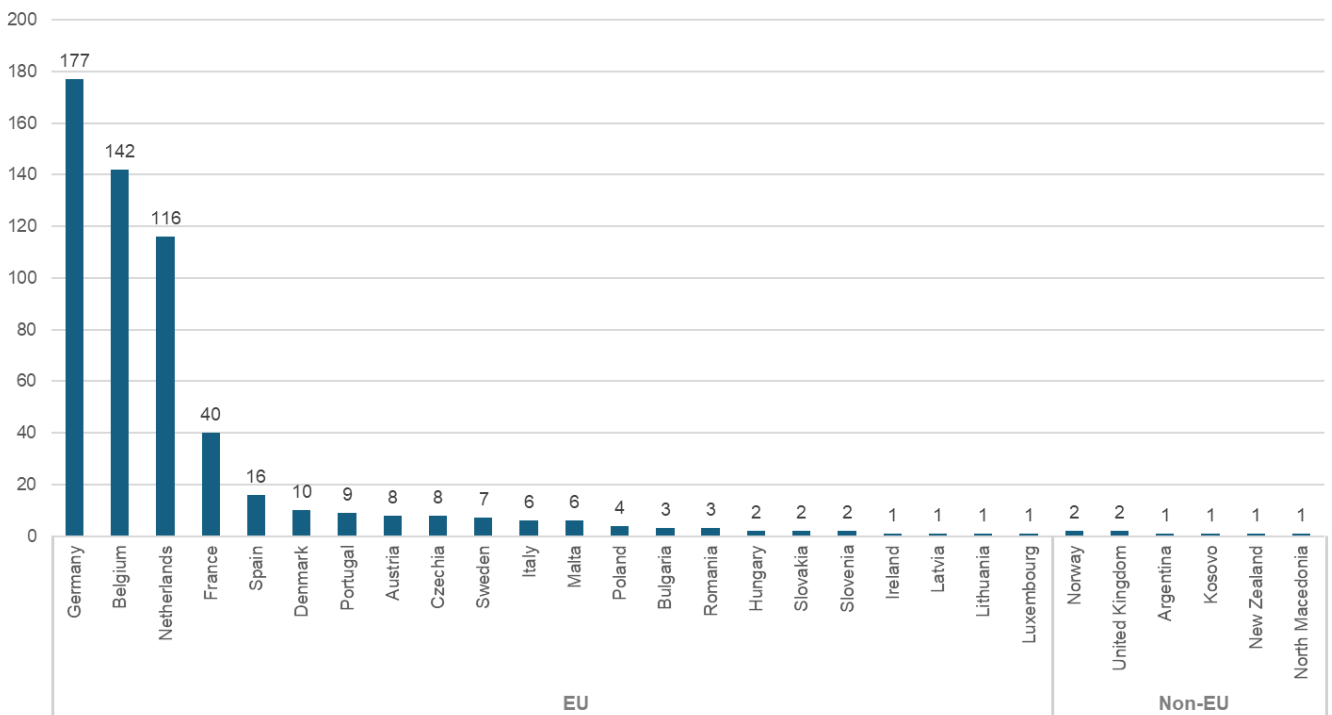
Figure 1: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group



**N=573**

The respondents represent 22 EU Member States and nine non-EU countries. Of these, 99 % come from an EU country. Respondents indicating Germany as their country of origin represent the largest group followed by Belgium and The Netherlands. Only 1 % of the respondents are from non-EU countries (United Kingdom, Norway, North Macedonia, New Zealand, Kosovo<sup>4</sup> and Argentina) (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Breakdown of responses by country of origin



**N=573**

<sup>4</sup> [United Nations Resolution 1244 \(1999\)](#)

To analyse the responses received from the Call for evidence, we used automated tools to scan all 573 responses and identify responses linked to the themes identified in the intervention logic of the AHL. Therefore, some responses might contribute to one or several of the themes and, in total, 517 responses contributed directly to the identified themes<sup>5</sup>. Each response was then categorised based on these themes, allowing us to quantify the number of respondents who supported specific topics. Since a single response could be relevant to multiple themes, its contribution might be counted towards multiple thematic areas.

## 3. Summary of replies

### 3.1. Effectiveness

While respondents were encouraged to identify possible improvements, several praised the AHL's risk-based approach. In addition, a few position papers submitted also praised this approach. EU citizens and NGOs most notably expressed support for the approach. Business associations, public authorities, and other organisations also expressed support. Additionally, nearly all respondents who praised the AHL stressed the clarity of roles established by the law, while some respondents highlighted the importance of the list and categorisation of diseases in terms of disease preparedness, prevention, and control. A few respondents specifically emphasised that the AHL provides a robust framework aligned with the 'One Health' principle, streamlining legal requirements for the movement of animals and products within the EU. Support for the clarity of roles and the categorisation of diseases was consistent across stakeholder groups, with NGOs, EU citizens, public authorities, and business associations all expressing similar levels of support.

However, respondents mostly raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of the law. A large number of respondents mentioned the negative impact on animal welfare. Some respondents noted that complex certification requirements like TRACES and veterinary treatments could lead to reduced animal welfare due to owners opting out of necessary procedures due to increased bureaucracy. Veterinary checks and certification requirements were also seen as barriers to timely treatment, further exacerbating animal welfare issues during disease outbreaks. Additionally, some respondents pointed out that animal quarantine requirements could lead to unnecessary delays and costs, ultimately affecting their welfare. When analysing the responses from different stakeholder groups, EU citizens comprised the majority of the respondents, followed by NGOs, other organisations, business associations, companies, public authorities, academic/research institutions, and environmental organisations.

In addition, many respondents highlighted differences in implementation as a major concern. Some respondents noted inconsistencies in the application of regulations across Member States, calling for more uniform implementation to better achieve the AHL's goals. Others pointed out disparities in interpreting specific rules and resulting variance in compliance costs, leading to significant inequalities between Member States. Variations in regulations, fees, and compliance costs, such as high TRACES fees, disproportionately disadvantage small Member States and border organisations. At the same time, larger states can facilitate animal movements over long distances without similar restrictions. Analysis by stakeholder groups shows EU citizens as the majority, followed by NGOs, business associations, and public authorities. Companies, consumer organisations, and environmental organisations were minimally represented.

Lastly, some respondents raised concerns about competition being distorted due to differences in the law's implementation in certain regions. The majority were EU citizens, followed by business associations and NGOs.

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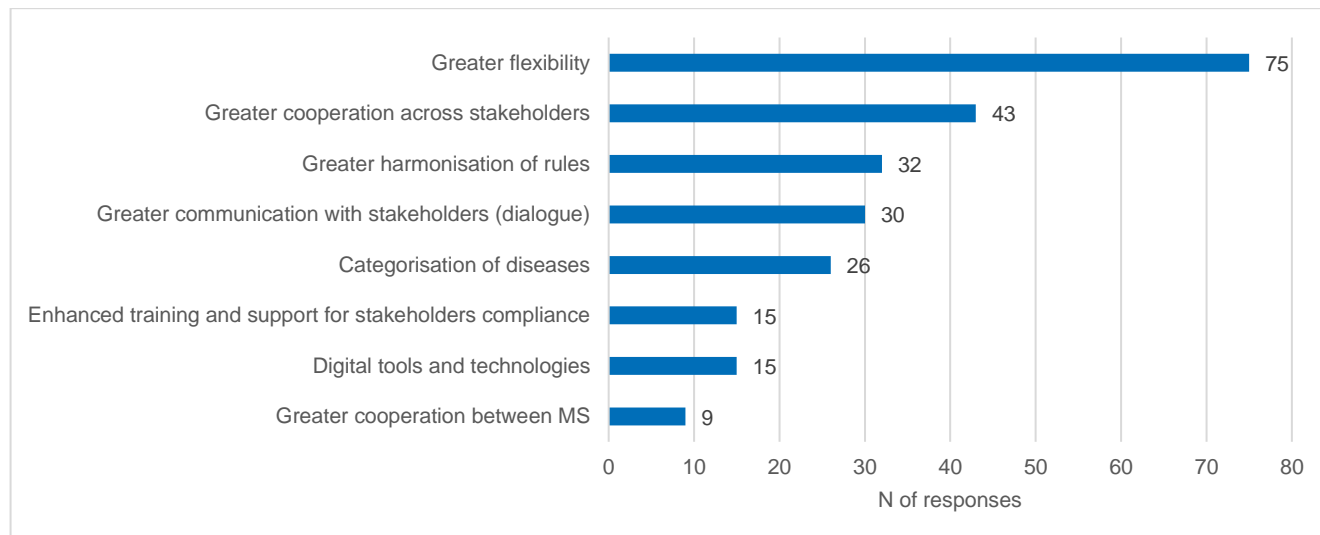
<sup>5</sup> Other inputs not included in the current analysis will be considered in future activities.

Several suggestions for improvement accompanied these concerns. Most of the respondents expressed the need for greater flexibility in the AHL. This theme was also suggested in a few position papers submitted. Suggestions included implementing more flexible procedures for health certificates and TRACES documents, allowing them to be signed by veterinarians familiar with the breeder or hobbyist and their collection. Other recommendations focused on increasing risk-based flexibility, particularly for farms located within 3 to 10 kilometres of an outbreak, and extending the duration of restricted zones.

In addition, many respondents suggested greater cooperation among stakeholders to ensure continued effectiveness in safeguarding food safety, food security, and animal health within the EU, particularly emphasising collaboration with farmers for effective implementation and enforcement. Similarly, respondents suggested that dialogue among stakeholders should be improved when drafting and enforcing the law. Some respondents also expressed the need for better categorisation of diseases, stating that it remains unclear what the long-term consequences of this categorisation will be, especially in cases of widespread infections, or pointing out a lack of clarity in the definitions.

A smaller group of respondents suggested integrating digital tools and technologies, such as enhanced digitalisation (e.g. e-certification and traceability data streamlining) and deploying technological advances (e.g. interfaces for different entry platforms). Same number of respondents recommended increasing training, sharing best practices, and providing support to ensure compliance. Additionally, a few respondents stressed the need for greater cooperation between Member States by fostering effective collaboration among government bodies, research entities, and veterinary experts to streamline efforts and maintain preparedness for outbreaks, disease control, and pandemics.

Figure 3 Overview of suggestions for improvements



N= 345<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2. Efficiency

Many respondents raised concerns about the administrative burden and additional costs imposed by the AHL.

- Most of the respondents mentioned administrative burden as a key issue; however, the majority of these were hobbyists, particularly concerned about the movement of animals. A significant portion of these concerns centred on the TRACES document required for cross-border animal transport. Other groups affected, to a

<sup>6</sup> N represents the total number of respondents discussing improvements

smaller extent, included farmers, competent authorities, veterinarians, and economic operators other than farmers. Among these four groups, the administrative burden was mainly associated with general administrative tasks linked to the overall implementation of the AHL and the movement of animals. Only a few reported burdens related to traceability, enforcement of rules and disease control measures, such as vaccination and other inquiries.

- ▶ Similarly, nearly half of the respondents mentioned additional costs as a concern, with most indicating that these additional costs primarily affected hobbyists. Farmers, competent authorities, economic operators other than farmers and veterinarians were also reported to be affected on a smaller scale. Among these latter four groups, concerns about additional costs, similar to those regarding administrative burdens, were mainly related to the movement of animals and the overall implementation of the AHL. Only a few respondents also identified additional costs associated with enforcement of the rules, traceability and disease control measures.

Farmers' primary complaints about the AHL centred on high costs and administrative burdens with little health benefits. A primary concern was the high cost of compliance with certain provisions, which farmers felt did not yield notable health benefits. For farmers engaged in breed conservation as well as hobbyists, the introduction of the TRACES document for cross-border animal transport was also reported to pose administrative burdens, with long processing times disrupting trade and animal exchanges. Few farmers also raised concerns about the rigid process of disease-free status recognition, suggesting that the implementation of uniform rules across large districts without accounting for local differences in health conditions could pose economic challenges.

Only a few respondents mentioned the administrative pressures faced by competent authorities. They observed that managing regulations related to individual diseases had become more complex, with information spread across various sources. This complexity made it difficult to obtain a clear overview, often requiring authorities to navigate multiple regulations.

A small number of respondents highlighted the additional burdens placed on veterinarians. While the AHL provides a strong framework for animal health, they noted that administrative requirements for both private and official veterinarians have increased over the years. It was noted that streamlining and consolidating these regulatory requirements, paperwork, and data gathering could enhance efficiency and reduce the stressors that impact the delivery of quality veterinary services, enabling veterinarians to achieve more effective animal health and welfare outcomes.

In line with the reported costs and burdens, various stakeholders requested legal exceptions or consideration of specific circumstances as part of their suggestions for improvements. Most of the respondents called for exceptions for hobbyists, arguing that the measures in place were disproportionate. Stakeholders requested exemptions related to the limits on the number of animals they could keep, transport permits, and other restrictions impacting their activities. Many also supported simplifying cross-border animal movement in Europe and called for the withdrawal of new rules to allow them to focus on their hobbies.

Exemptions were also requested on a smaller scale for exotic and zoo animal owners and wild animal owners. Stakeholders argued that without private owners, many species would no longer be found in zoos and that the law should either be revised or exclude breeders and zoos from its scope. Wild animal owners also highlighted unnecessary costs and obstacles to genetic exchange.

In this regard, stakeholders suggested revising certain legal definitions to ensure greater clarity. A few position papers submitted addressed this issue. For instance, two NGOs expressed a lack of clarity over some current disease definitions in the AHL, noting that the wording creates uncertainties in interpretation. They emphasised the need for more careful consideration in defining these categories to avoid confusion and ensure appropriate application of the rules. Other stakeholders called for clearer distinctions between small private holdings and commercial operations, as well as better classification of certain animals in the Regulation.

### 3.3. Coherence

Respondents stressed the importance of external factors in the implementation of the AHL:

- ▶ Several respondents highlighted climate change as a concern. Some stakeholders argued that animal transport regulations must be adapted to the growing impact of climate change (e.g. heat). Others emphasised that as climate change accelerates and untouched habitats diminish, maintaining genetically healthy populations in captivity becomes vital.
- ▶ A few respondents emphasised the need to consider the geopolitical context, citing the Ukraine-Russia war and global challenges like pandemics and cross-border diseases as reasons for making adaptable and responsive regulations. In addition, a few respondents stressed the role of technological advancements in animal management, highlighting the benefits of tools like foot rings, transponders, and microchips for efficient bird identification and traceability, which help in monitoring and responding to emergencies.

In terms of EU policies, stakeholders underscored the opportunity to enhance consistency with other key regulations. Some respondents welcomed the alignment with the One Health approach, emphasising its importance for integrating animal health and welfare. They recommended reinforcing this principle within the AHL, noting that effective animal health management must consider animal welfare to achieve better health outcomes. In addition, respondents suggested revising the AHL to adopt rules for structural and EU-wide harmonisation, building on policies such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and other regulations such as the Official Controls Regulation, the Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulation, the Food Law, and the Hygiene Package.

### 3.4. Relevance

As concerns relevance, the large number of respondents to this call for evidence shows the importance of the AHL. In particular,

- ▶ Many respondents explicitly expressed their support for the AHL and welcomed the Regulation's framework;
- ▶ Some respondents appreciated the comprehensiveness of the legal framework; and
- ▶ A few respondents valued its simplified and unified nature.

These responses notably indicated that the AHL allowed the establishment of clearer rules, supporting public authorities and the livestock sector in preventing and eradicating diseases.

At the same time, many respondents pointed out the complexity of the law. Stakeholders noted that the detailed and extensive texts make it difficult to identify the relevant sections and that the linear structure of the law and the linear format could benefit from adjustments to improve clarity and ease of implementation. Among these, EU citizens made up the largest portion of respondents, followed by public authorities, business associations, NGOs and other organisations.

### 3.5. EU added-value

On whether the AHL brings EU-added value, several respondents called for greater harmonisation of rules. This concern was also reflected in 9 out of 49 position papers, which advocated for unifying and harmonising laws into a more coherent legislative framework. Respondents emphasised the need for uniformity among Member States, particularly through specific provisions for implementing preventive measures.

## Annexe 1 Campaigns

Regarding the campaigns, three distinct ones were identified among the responses. The first, which was published by *Vereinigung für Artenschutz, Vogelhaltung und Vogelzucht (AZ) e.V.*, a non-profit association, raised concerns about the high costs and excessive bureaucracy associated with TRACES certificates. It argued that these certificates impose significant financial burdens on hobbyists, with veterinarians often lacking specialisation in the species they evaluate, leading to inadequate health checks. The short validity period of the certificate further complicates matters. The campaign proposed alternatives such as self-regulation, exemptions for small-scale transactions, and legal adjustments to better accommodate the needs of hobbyists, warning that without these changes, the survival of rare species could be at risk.<sup>7</sup> A total of 17 responses were excluded from this campaign.

The second, published by two Federations of Associations for the protection of nature and animals – *ProNatura France* and *Federación Fauna* – advocates for exceptions to the AHL, arguing that these regulations impose undue costs and bureaucratic burdens on hobbyists. The campaign argues that the AHL creates obstacles that threaten biodiversity and conservation efforts. It argues that the regulations take away valuable time and resources from caring for animals, making it harder to contribute to conservation and protect genetic diversity. The campaign calls for exceptions to be made to preserve these activities, stressing the importance of supporting the natural connection between humans and wildlife<sup>8</sup>. A total of 191 responses were excluded.

The third campaign raised concerns that current EU regulations on animal health certificates for bird movements (Article 71 of Regulation 2020/688) impose excessive costs and administrative burdens on hobby birdkeepers<sup>9</sup>. Particularly, the campaign argued that the TRACES certificate is disproportionately expensive compared to the value of the birds being transported. It emphasises that the risk of disease transmission is low when small numbers of birds are exchanged among hobbyists and stresses the importance of maintaining genetic diversity through international exchanges. The campaign proposed either eliminating the TRACES requirement for small-scale bird exchanges or introducing a simpler, self-declared health certificate. The text was published by two non-profit organisations, *Kleindier Liefhebbers Nederland* and *Aviornis International Nederland*. A total of 100 responses were excluded.

<sup>7</sup> See campaign text published on their social media at: [https://www.facebook.com/p/Vereinigung-f%C3%BCr-Artenschutz-Vogelhaltung-und-Vogelzucht-AZ-eV-100077369680789/?\\_rd=1](https://www.facebook.com/p/Vereinigung-f%C3%BCr-Artenschutz-Vogelhaltung-und-Vogelzucht-AZ-eV-100077369680789/?_rd=1)

<sup>8</sup> See campaign text at: <https://www.pronatura-france.fr/infos/944-30-03-24-consultation-ue> and: [https://www.instagram.com/federacionfauna/p/C5DXHS\\_sv0u/?locale=%E5%93%AA%E9%87%8C%E8%83%BD%E5%8A%9E%E8%91%A1%E8%90%84%E7%89%99%E6%B5%8B%E8%AF%95%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%E3%80%96%E5%A8%81%E4%BF%A1%2BTG%2F%E9%A3%9E%E6%9C%BA%3A%40buth2788%E3%80%97819NK](https://www.instagram.com/federacionfauna/p/C5DXHS_sv0u/?locale=%E5%93%AA%E9%87%8C%E8%83%BD%E5%8A%9E%E8%91%A1%E8%90%84%E7%89%99%E6%B5%8B%E8%AF%95%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%E3%80%96%E5%A8%81%E4%BF%A1%2BTG%2F%E9%A3%9E%E6%9C%BA%3A%40buth2788%E3%80%97819NK)

<sup>9</sup> See campaign text at: [https://www.aviornis.nl/actueel/aviornis-nederland-nieuws/bekijk/artikel/oproep-aan-leden-evaluatie-traces-certificaat-voor-het-transporteren-van-vogels-binnen-de-eu/?tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=62&cHash=29ef51e9122b806e80de237a0a02001b](https://www.aviornis.nl/actueel/aviornis-nederland-nieuws/bekijk/artikel/oproep-aan-leden-evaluatie-traces-certificaat-voor-het-transporteren-van-vogels-binnen-de-eu/?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=62&cHash=29ef51e9122b806e80de237a0a02001b) and <https://kleindierliefhebbers.nl/nieuws/oproep-evaluatie-gezondheidscertificaat/>