

Launch of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare: Q&A on Animal Welfare policy

Today, European Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis officially inaugurates the kick-off meeting of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare (the Platform). The Platform will gather 75 representatives from stakeholders, NGOs, scientists, Member States, EEA (European Economic Area) countries, international organisations and EFSA (European Food Safety Authority). This is the 1st time that all key EU players will gather to exchange experiences and contribute to improving the welfare of animals.

Why is the Commission launching this Platform?

As indicated by the Eurobarometer survey published in March 2016, an absolute majority of Europeans considers the protection of animal welfare very important and would like to see improvements in the way the welfare of animals is protected.

Improving animal welfare is not only a matter of legislation. And the Platform is not a forum for developing new legislation. As stated in the motto of the [EU animal welfare strategy](#) adopted in 2012 “**Everyone is responsible**“. To get concrete results, mutual understanding and trust between all players as well as concrete engagement by each actor is an essential first step and it is one of the key objectives of the Platform.

The Platform aims to promote dialogue among competent authorities, businesses, civil society and scientists on animal welfare issues that are relevant for EU citizens.

The Platform will assist the Commission with the development and exchange of coordinated actions on animal welfare with focus on:

1. better application of EU rules on animal welfare, through exchanges of information, best practices and the direct involvement of stakeholders,
2. the development and use of voluntary commitments by businesses,
3. the promotion of EU animal welfare standards at the global level.

Who are the members of the Platform?

The Platform is made up of 75 members.

Forty (40) members have been appointed by the Director General for Health and Food Safety following a call for applications to represent business and professional organisations, organisations from civil society and independent experts from research institutes. Both organisations and experts had to demonstrate the relevance of their activities and expertise for the tasks of

the Platform. In particular their work has to be relevant for animal welfare in an EU context and covering several Member States.

How are the members of the Platform selected?

The different members have been selected with the aim to ensure a fair representation between various sectors and activities as well as geographical and gender balance.

Thirty five (35) members represent public institutions such as competent authorities (28 Member States and 3 EEA countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway), international organisations working on animal welfare (World Organisation for Animal Health, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the World Bank) and the European Food Safety Authority.

The Platform may also appoint a maximum of five observers. Switzerland has been granted an observer status in the Platform.

How the platform will work in the practice?

The Platform will meet twice a year. At its first meeting the Commission intends to identify priority areas of work for its members but also resources that members are ready to share. Based on the results of the first meeting the Commission will then propose specific areas of work and if necessary sub-groups will be established.

The Platform will regularly invite other forums or stakeholders to present their initiatives and activities. This will not only enrich its debates but facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, initiatives and experiences that could be used by members. It will also facilitate coordination and complementarity between initiatives taken in different forums.

Which subjects will be addressed first?

In the inaugural meeting of the Platform, the Commission will promote discussions on its priority areas in three sessions:

-How the Platform can contribute to better application and understanding of the EU legislation on animal welfare?

-How the Platform can contribute to promote EU animal welfare standards globally?

– How the Platform can facilitate the use of voluntary commitments and promote market value of animal welfare friendly products?

Based on the debates and commitments by members the Commission will identify EU relevant areas of work of common interest .that are sufficiently concrete and achievable.

Which outcome can be expected from the work of the Platform?

Platform represents a great opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to improving the welfare of animals through cooperation and networking. Hence, the outcome of the Platform will greatly depend on the active and constructive participation of each member.

The Platform is first of all a forum to share information and experience. It is also an opportunity to increase understanding, develop trust and cooperation between its members.

The Platform will also be the ideal place for all specialised forums/groups working on animal welfare to present their activities and projects and to agree on specific voluntary commitments. There are indeed various spheres where animal welfare is today debated at international level, such as the European Food Safety Authority, the organisation [EuroFAWC](#) or the [World Organisation for Animal Health](#). The Platform could therefore play the role of a hub for connecting these various forums/groups and contribute to improving the overall results.

The Commission believes that the Platform should work on concrete and achievable objectives with the aim of having long term effects on how animal welfare issues are addressed.

The Platform could work on specific projects to help the Commission in its objectives which include a better implementation of the EU animal welfare legislation or the promotion of EU standards at the global level. While these matters remain primarily under the responsibility of the Member States and the EU institutions, stakeholders can bring their experience and expertise to support and complement these activities through various angles and means (applied research, education, vocational training, conferences, etc.).

The Platform could also develop activities where there is no specific EU legislation or activities in order to promote good animal welfare practices. This could be done by the production of guidance documents on specific issues (like phasing out the castration of piglets) or on more general topics (e.g. animal welfare labelling).

How is animal welfare tackled at EU level? What is the existing legislation?

The first EU legislation on animal welfare was adopted in 1974^[1] which referred to the protection of animals in slaughterhouses. Since then, the EU has adopted legal texts to protect farm and laboratory animals. There are also EU provisions on the keeping of animals in zoos with animal welfare references. The EU has also banned the use of leghold traps for the capture of wild animals.

Farm animals are protected by a general set of EU rules on farming as well as specific provisions on transport and slaughter/killing. Furthermore, specific additional rules exist for the keeping of laying hens, chickens for meat production, pigs and calves.

The EU also integrates animal welfare requirements into the rules for

agriculture subsidies (cross-compliance and rural development programmes) as well as for organic farming.

Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU requires the Union and the Member States to pay full regard to their welfare requirements when they prepare or implement certain Union policies, since animals are sentient beings.

However, this obligation does not constitute a legal base for the Union to legislate on any animal welfare issues. Some of them remain under the sole competence of the Member States (see later question on wild animals).

Within this scope, the Commission activities on animal welfare are not limited to legislation. While implementation of EU rules is mainly under the responsibility of the Member States, the Commission also carries out regular audits to check that competent authorities are performing official controls appropriately.

Moreover the Commission is actively involved in promoting EU animal welfare standards at international level through global standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health and through bilateral agreements/cooperation with non-EU countries.

Finally, the Commission organises regular training activities on animal welfare for officials from Member States and non-EU countries. In the near future the Commission will also designate reference centres on animal welfare (see below).

Who's in charge of applying these rules?

Member States have an important role to play in all cases because they are responsible for the implementation of EU rules through various means which include official controls, but also the development and the implementation of instructions, guidelines and information campaigns to officials and stakeholders. Such development may also imply financing research programmes at national level.

In particular, many pieces of EU animal welfare legislation contain the obligation for the Member States to provide and validate training for people dealing with animals. Member States must therefore dedicate the appropriate resources to ensure that operators are competent when handling and keeping animals.

What about animals not covered by EU's laws and wild animals?

In the EU treaties, animal welfare represents an issue to be considered within the framework of certain EU policies such as agriculture or internal market. The EU has no mandate to tackle all animal welfare issues (see above).

This is the case for example for the welfare of stray dogs/cats or the use of

animals in shows or competitions (corridas, rodeos, circuses, racing dogs or horses, etc.). While the Commission is frequently asked to act on these issues, it has no legal power to intervene.

The Union has also very limited competence on the welfare of wild animals.

As regards the welfare of wild animals kept in captivity, a [directive on zoos and aquaria](#) contains references to the welfare requirements of animals. Other wild animals kept in captivity are not subject to EU animal welfare rules (like circuses or pet shops).

Except for the prohibition of the use of leg hold traps, the Union has no legislation to protect animals living in the wild.

Will new rules be adopted in the near future?

At this point, the Commission's priority is to ensure that EU existing rules are fully implemented. Indeed, there is no point adopting new requirements if the current ones still need to be better applied.

This does not mean that the Commission does not act on animal welfare issues which are under the remit of the Union.

The welfare of animals can be substantially improved through various non legislative activities which the Commission is presently developing (see next question).

Will the Commission adopt a new animal welfare strategy? If not, what will the Commission do for animal welfare?

In 2012, the Commission adopted an EU Strategy on Animal Welfare which listed a series of actions to be performed.

The Commission first wants to complete the outstanding actions which consist of six studies and reports. Some of them are technical, others are more strategic but they are all important to feed our future reflections on animal welfare. Some of them will also contribute to improving implementation through the production of guidance documents (best practices on animal transport, best practice on slaughter/killing of animals).

It is therefore a priority for the Commission to make sure that, by the end of 2017, all these actions are finalised in order to have all the needed information for the future.

This is why, for the time being, the Commission is not working on another strategy.

Besides completing the 2012 strategy, the Commission is working on four priorities:

1. better application of EU rules on animal welfare,
2. developing stakeholders' dialogue,
3. promoting EU standards at the global level,
4. designation of EU reference centres on animal welfare.

On better application of EU rules, the Commission has focused its actions on specific projects following the results of previous audits. Priority has been given in particular to the welfare of pigs, where wide non-compliance still exists as regards the prohibition on routine tail docking and the provision of manipulable materials for pigs. The Commission is also actively supporting the Member States to improve the implementation of the legislation on transport with a specific focus on live export to non-EU countries.

Stakeholders' dialogue will be developed through the activities of the Platform. The Commission adopted a decision to create the Platform in January 2017 and it is foreseen that at least two meetings will take place every year.

Promoting EU standards at global level is achieved by various long term activities such as the negotiation of international standards at the World Organisation for Animal Health (today there are 13 international animal welfare standards thanks to the EU impulse) and including animal welfare in bilateral free trade agreements.

The designation of EU reference centres will be established within one year after the entry into force of the new Official Controls regulation (see below).

How will animal welfare be addressed in the new Official Controls Regulation?

The Regulation requires the Union to designate EU Reference Centres for animal welfare. They will assist EU countries in their official controls by carrying out scientific and technical studies, conducting training courses and disseminating research findings and information on technical innovations. The EU Reference Centres will also provide the scientific and technical expertise on methods to assess and improve the welfare of animals.

The Regulation also applies to official controls on animal welfare rules, e.g. on transport, slaughter and farming, and allows the adoption of Commission legislation to adjust official control requirements to meet the specific needs of animal welfare such as the introduction of animal welfare indicators.

Regulation (EU) No 2017/265 entered into force on 27 April 2017 and the designation of the EU Reference Centres will have to be completed within one year after that date.

For more information:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare_en

[1] [Council Directive 74/577/EEC of 18 November 1974 on stunning of animals before slaughter](#) OJ L 316, 26.11.1974, p. 10