

Position Paper
from
The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Denmark

Establishment of an
EU Platform on Animal Welfare

Background

In December 2014 the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark signed a joint declaration in Vught in the Netherlands. In the declaration the European Commission is called upon to establish an EU platform for animal welfare for stakeholders and competent authorities with the purpose to generate momentum and focus on the animal welfare challenges faced by the EU. The initiative was supported by a number of Member States at the AGRIFISH Council 15-16 December, 2014.

The conference on pig welfare in Copenhagen 29 – 30 April, 2015, emphasizes the importance of the establishment of such a platform. Over 300 participants representing government authorities, NGO's and international experts discussed various issues with regard to pig welfare. It is important to establish a platform/forum within the European Union which facilitates stakeholders coming together not only to follow up on the discussion (from the conference) regarding pig welfare but to continue discussions on animal welfare in general. We are facing a number of challenges when it comes to animal welfare, thus action is needed.

The joint proposal from the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Denmark shows how an animal welfare platform could be established and organised in the EU.

Aim

There must be a greater recognition within the EU-system, Member States included, of animal welfare as an important element in EU policies, cf. article 13 in TFEU. The establishment of a joint European Animal Welfare Platform - based in DG SANTE - would serve as a common forum for respectively the Commission, Member States, animal welfare organisations, agriculture organisations, veterinary associations, consumers etc. to discuss matters concerning animal welfare.

A platform would be able to facilitate the exchanging of experiences and best practices regarding initiatives on animal welfare, hereunder in regards to implementation, controls and enforcement of existing legislation within the EU, thus being a valuable tool in the efforts towards more uniform and transparent regulation. These are all measures that are imperative in securing a level playing field in the internal market. In order to increase productivity, promote jobs and growth, the EU needs to be at the forefront of the sustainable development, this is especially true in the husbandry sector. A platform would support the Member States in these efforts.

In addition, a joint European Animal Welfare Platform will contribute positively to the development towards higher standards of animal welfare based on scientific results and gained experience, while serving the following purposes:

- The platform will provide an example of coordinated action on this issue by different parts of society that will encourage union, national, regional or local initiatives across Europe.
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences and make visible initiatives taken to promote animal welfare by the Commission, Member States or organisations.

- Development of partnerships among stakeholders.
- Identifying (national) legislation including best practices in the Member States.
- Networking, including sharing of knowledge and information on research.
- Commitment from stakeholders to contribute to promoting animal welfare.

Organisation

In view of this, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Denmark suggest a two-tiered approach for the establishment of an EU Platform on Animal Welfare. The platform would thus consist of a larger forum including all relevant stakeholders and a smaller "high level" group of Member States, run by the Commission. The role of the high level group should for example be to draw up plans and mutual agreements, follow up on current policies and strengthening cooperation between Member States.

The platform could be established and organised similar to the model for the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, which is also facilitated by the Commission. If the high level group could be hosted in any of the already existing forums it might be preferable providing it can be organised to assure that enough time are set aside for platform issues.

Perspective

It is foreseen that a joint European platform, based in the Commission, could be the starting point for a dialogue to strengthen animal welfare standards in the EU and might eventually lead to new legislation in the area of animal welfare. The platform will be able to facilitate the initial discussions among Member States at an informal level, and at the same time be a valuable contribution in promoting joint initiatives. The platform would be a useful tool for the Commission and the Member States to provide better and more uniform legislation, interpretation and implementation. Future reference centres for animal welfare will have the potential to make valuable contribution to the work of the platform.

Considering the above mentioned proposal the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Denmark encourage the Commission to take steps to establish an EU Platform on Animal Welfare, and we encourage all Member States to join this initiative and thus take part in the future cooperation to improve animal welfare in the EU.



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