

Richard Corbett MEP



EUROPEAN ANIMAL WELFARE NEWS



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Hello and welcome to my Animal Welfare Newsletter. This has been sent to you as someone who has contacted me to express your concerns on an issue of animal welfare. I hope that this newsletter provides you with information so you can see what the European Parliament and I are doing in working for the protection of animals. I hope that you find this information useful. If you have any queries or comments please contact me at the address below.

Best wishes, Richard

Tackling illegal dog-fighting

A Written Declaration (the equivalent in the European Parliament of an “Early Day Motion” in the House of Commons) is currently being tabled in the European Parliament aimed at addressing the issue of illegal dog-fighting that takes place in various member states across the EU. Even though this cruel practice is banned throughout Europe it is still carried out illegally. This issue came alive again at the end of August when the BBC *Panorama* programme produced an undercover investigation of dog-fighting throughout Europe. It was discovered that Northern Ireland is a centre of dog-fighting where 15 gangs are involved in this business. An international network trades and supplies Pit Bull Terriers that are used for fighting purposes. The dogs are often purchased in Finland and then exported to the Republic of Ireland where this breed is not illegal. From there they can be easily brought across the border to Northern Ireland where they are used in fighting shows.

Even though the European Union has a pet passport scheme it is not effective at dealing with this problem. Pit Bull Terriers are often mis-described as cross breeds which facilitates their movements throughout Europe. It is obvious that requirements have to be stricter in that regard.

The written declaration has three main requests for the European Commission:

- to act upon Parliament's response to the Animal Welfare Action Plan, which called for all animals, not just farm animals, to be included in EU animal protection measures;
- to take further steps to ensure that dog-fighting is stamped out throughout the EU;
- to review the operation of the EU Pet Passport scheme under Regulation (EC) 998/2003, with a view to ensuring that its purposes are not frustrated by the mis-description of dogs.

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Wild Bird hunting in Malta

An issue that many constituents have contacted me about recently is the illegal Spring Hunt in Malta. Malta is located on an important bird migration route in the Mediterranean. The European Union's Wild Birds Directive specifically protects birds during their perilous spring migration from Africa to their breeding grounds further north in Europe, including the UK. It is a good example of a subject where Europe-wide laws are needed – but they must be enforced. Currently, laws in Malta allow the hunting of the birds during spring which is having a devastating effect on their number. This has caused me great concern and I took it up with the Commission to demand that Malta adhere to European laws on the protection of birds. My Parliamentary Question to the Commission on the issue is below, along with the Commission's answer. As you will see, the Commission has given Malta its final warning and if the practice continues, they will take Malta to the Court of Justice to force them to comply.



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My Parliamentary Question:

“Has the Commission issued a Reasoned Opinion to Malta's government in regard to their continued refusal to adhere to the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)? If not, why not?”

Does the Commission plan to enact an interim measure against Malta to prevent spring hunting in time for the 2008 spring hunt if Malta continues to flaunt this directive?

Finally, does the Commission believe that by allowing Malta to ignore this directive they are sending out a strong message to other Member States on its enforcement?”

Commission's reply:

“The issue of illegal spring shooting of Turtle Dove and Quail to which the Honourable Member refers is subject to an ongoing infringement procedure relating to non-compliance by Malta with the hunting provisions of Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds. At the last meeting to discuss infringements on 17 October 2007, the Commission decided to send Malta a reasoned opinion under Article 226 of the EC Treaty. A reasoned opinion is sent where the Commission takes the view that a breach of EU legislation has occurred and requires that the Member State takes the steps necessary to address the breach. The Member State has two months in which to respond. If the breach persists, the next step is for the Commission to propose that the case is transferred to the Court.

The Commission is taking - and will continue to take - all appropriate measures in order to ensure that Malta, as well as all the other Member States, complies with the Birds Directive. If Malta does not comply with the Birds Directive, the Commission will not hesitate to continue the infringement procedure to its conclusion.”

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Testing on animals

On 5 November, the European Commission published its Fifth Report on “the Statistics on the Number of Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes in the Member States of the European Union”. Unfortunately, the report indicates an increase in the number of animals used in experiments across Europe from 10.7 million in 2002 to 12.1 million in 2005.

The most used animals are rodents and rabbits, followed by cold-blooded animals and then birds. On the positive side, no great apes were reportedly used in any of the Member States for 2005. Regarding non-human primates, they represent the same proportion of 0.1% of the total number of animals used as in the previous report. The number of animals used in cosmetics testing increased by 50% between 2001 and 2005 to 5,571. Almost all of the cosmetics testing occurred in France. The practice of testing cosmetics on animals will be illegal across the EU from 2009.

Speaking at the European Partnership for Alternative Approaches to Animal Testing (EPAA), EU Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik criticised industry and academia for failing to commit sufficient resources to find alternatives to animal testing, while promising ongoing Commission support. He noted that, from a total of 30 methods validated by the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM), only eight have so far gained regulatory acceptance and he suggested that at least some of this bottleneck is due to a lack of communication between researchers and regulators. Potocnik insisted that on the long term, likely reductions in cost and creation of new alternatives will be commercially rewarding as well as saving thousands of animals from being used for research.

Another development is that the European Commission and the US Food and Drug Administration have agreed to intensify their collaboration in order to reduce animal testing at a meeting of the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) that began in November. Participants agreed on a need to intensify efforts internationally in order to ensure the effective validation and acceptance of alternative testing methods. In particular, the European Commission and the US Food and Drug Administration agreed to cooperate more closely in the peer review of validation studies of alternative methods to animal testing for cosmetics in order to contribute to a reduction in animal tests.

The pain of docked-tailed pigs

An investigation by the animal welfare group, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), has revealed that nearly all pigs bred for the table in the UK have their tails docked, despite the practice being outlawed by European legislation. Farmers contend that docking is necessary to prevent infection as a result of tail biting. The 2001 Pig Directive, incorporated into British law in 2003, only allows the practice where there is a real risk of tail biting and where other alternative methods of improving the pigs' conditions have failed. But the investigation found that this was happening nearly all the time.

I have written to the Minister of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to request they give this matter their urgent attention as this practice runs counter to what the UK has agreed at European level.

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Transportation of livestock

The transportation of livestock is an issue that I feel strongly about. I welcomed the EU's regulation on transporting livestock in 2005. The regulation states that "no person shall transport animals or cause animals to be transported in a way that is likely to cause injury or undue suffering to them." I therefore read with alarm reports that this regulation was not being adhered to.

The International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH) has begun a campaign to end the long distance transport of horses to slaughter in Europe. Around 100,000 horses travel into and across Europe every year - forced to endure unnecessary journeys that can take up to four days, only to be slaughtered when they reach their destination. Ultimately, the ILPH would like to see long distance transport to slaughter replaced with a carcass-only trade, meaning just the meat is transported to areas of demand. I fully support the ILPH's campaign and have taken the matter up with the Commission. My Parliamentary Question to the Commission is below and I shall keep you informed of any developments:

My Written Question:

"As part of their *Make A Noise* campaign, the International League for the Protection of Horses has found evidence of a lack of partitions in animal transportation lorries, overcrowding and disregard for the requirement to provide food and water for the transported horses.

How does the Commission plan to effectively enforce regulation EC 1/2005 in line with the requirement to install individual stalls for horses and to rest and nourish animals after the eight hour period of time detailed in the regulation?

As one example, the regulation foresaw a satellite tracking system that would monitor animal transportation to ensure the enforcement of this regulation. How does the Commission plan to implement such a system?

The European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee has stressed that live transport "*should be avoided whenever possible*" and "*[t]he occurrence of poor welfare can be reduced considerably by slaughtering near the point of rearing*". Does the Commission plan to act on this recommendation?"

What is the Animal Welfare Intergroup?

The Animal Welfare Intergroup is an informal group consisting of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from a variety of parties who have a common concern about animal welfare. The group aims to mobilise cross party support for animal welfare and conservation. The group's executive meets every three months to consider which issues they would like the EU to discuss and deliberate on.

The group has had many important successes and helped to obtain a ban on imports of baby seal products into the European Union, and helped to phase out the battery-cage system for laying hens. The work of the Animal Welfare Intergroup is integral to ensuring that the welfare of animals is addressed at a European level, and as a member I will continue to do my utmost to ensure that I and my Labour colleagues continue our work to stop unnecessary cruelty to animals.

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