

# **Speech by Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Vytenis Andriukaitis at the European Parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals in Strasbourg, France, on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

Chairman, Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you at today's Intergroup meeting. It is a useful opportunity to follow up more broadly to the meeting we had, Jeppe, last month.

As we approach the final year of this Commission's mandate, we are starting to reflect - on what has been achieved, and what remains to be done.

During our last meeting we had a very open and constructive exchange on the current animal welfare situation. And whilst I am proud of the progress we have made, it is clear we're not yet at the stage we can say, "job done".

So today, I want to focus on the priorities going forward as well as the achievements to date.

In this respect, I believe it is very useful for me to be able to provide this feedback after the intervention of Mr. Wojciechowski who conducted, I think we can all agree, one of the most comprehensive audits ever done on the issue of animal welfare in the EU.

I would like to stress here that I fully respect and agree with the conclusions of the Court of Auditors, which provides a very clear and detailed picture of what has been done and what needs to be completed in our endeavour to continuously improve animal welfare.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

The number one priority is – and will remain - enforcement. This is an essential part of our daily work. We must work together to improve the enforcement of EU rules on animal welfare.

Two of the current priorities – as you flagged in our meeting and highlighted by the report of the Court of Auditors- are pig welfare and protection of animals during transport.

### **– Animal Transport**

On animal transport, we discussed various concerns, and the steps to address them. I know that some of you have made of the issue their personal and political priority and I would like to publicly thank Ms. Hazekamp and Mr. Eck for the effort and the time spent last summer to monitor the situation on the ground.

I would like to start by acknowledging that there are issues which need to be addressed, especially in terms of proper implementation of the legislation. Currently, the Commission is focussing on three main areas of non-compliance:

- Exporting animals by road in extreme temperatures,
- Exporting animals by sea, and
- Transport of unweaned calves.

**A sub-group of the EU Platform on animal welfare has been set up** to specifically work on these issues and find common solutions. I look very much forward to the results of this work.

In the meantime the Commission – and myself personally – has written – several times – to Member States: we have requested they respect temperature requirements and properly implement rules to protect animals during transport.

It is clear we are not there yet. But I am pleased that my intervention has not been without effect because, as you know, **few Member States have decided to stop exports to Turkey in the hot months, while others have reinforced their monitoring in this area.**

My services have conducted audits in the Member States concerned. This includes reviewing any incidents reported by NGOs and visits to some of the most concerned ports. This summer, we also monitored the situation at Bulgaria's border with Turkey.

In extreme synthesis, these audits showed improvements in official controls and in compliance with the Regulation, when compared with previous experiences. However, weaknesses remain in official expertise to approve livestock vessels and in the preparation to deal with setbacks at the ports of exit (for instance in terms of delays in loading the vessel).

We are following up on all of these actions where necessary and **we are working on the preparation of an overview report which will be ready in 2019.** The EU Chief Veterinary Officers are debating this issue and trying to agree to a common solution.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely and **will consider options to enforce the rules if needed.** I will also reiterate my call on the issue of transport directly to Ministers in one of the future Agricultural Councils.

#### – **Pig welfare**

This is probably the sector on which we have invested most of our time and limited resources. Let me just mention few of the actions taken during my mandate:

1. We have provided considerable support to Member States, including a **Recommendation to help implement the Pig Directive.**
2. This was followed by **study visits** to the countries which do not tail-dock and an overview report on lessons learned.
3. **Two conferences** have also been held and educational materials were developed on the welfare of pigs.
4. We have **audited all the biggest producing Member States.**
5. We have created a **group of technical experts (TAILS)** with on-the-ground experience in rearing pigs with entire tails. TAILS is visiting the main EU producing countries during these months
6. We have devoted to the welfare of pigs the **first EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare**
7. Last and most importantly the **EU platform on animal welfare has pig welfare among its core objectives** as proven by the creation of a specific subgroup on the issue.

The work is not finished but we start seeing the first results of these activities. **26 Member States have this year submitted Action Plans and updates to prevent tail biting and tail docking.**

This is an important step to improve on-farm welfare. The Commission is currently assessing these plans. This work will be supported by the EU Platform's sub-group on pig welfare. It will provide the Commission with valuable advice and experience.

Following a European Parliament's support, **the Commission has recently started a pilot project to address castration.** It promotes the use of meat from uncastrated pigs and will allow guidelines and best practices to be developed. These efforts will help address and reduce unnecessary pig pain.

## – Broiler welfare

Other important enforcement priorities include broiler welfare. The Commission is **working with Member States to promote good practice for controls and farm management** following the report we adopted in April this year. Next year the Commission will work to **identify indicators to monitor the severity, extent and permanence of animal welfare problems.**

## PET WELFARE

We are also supporting activities to promote pet welfare. Several Commission initiatives have **tackled the risks and challenges linked to increasing online - and illegal - trade in pets.**

These include training national authorities and meeting with stakeholders to share information and intelligence on illegal practices.

This summer the Commission adopted a **Recommendation - for a coordinated EU plan for official controls on online sales of dogs and cats.** It suggests a harmonised approach to look for, and check, websites selling dogs and cats.

I am pleased this received wide support from Member States. I hope many will help put it into practice and we will see results in the first half of 2019.

## FISH WELFARE

Another issue we have discussed extensively in the EU Platform is the welfare of farmed fish. Within my mandate, the Commission has completed a study – foreseen under the Animal Welfare Strategy - and this year, it adopted a **report to the Parliament and Council on fish welfare at the time of killing.**

Looking ahead, the Commission is committed to promoting information, best practices and direct involvement of stakeholders. This work will be supported by the **voluntary subgroup on the welfare of farmed fish created under the EU Platform.**

## EQUINE WELFARE

Another voluntary subgroup has been set up to focus on equine welfare – care of equines and responsible ownership. I am pleased that **well-advanced guidance on responsible equine ownership was presented at last month's Platform meeting.** And I want to reassure you that I strongly raised with the competent authorities the issue of pregnant mares used for the production of hormones during my recent visit to Argentina.

## OTHER ACTIONS

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not an exhaustive list. Rather, it is a flavour of some of the progress, some of the challenges and some goals for the future. Improving and ensuring enforcement will remain a priority for the rest of my time in office. And be clear, I want as much progress as possible.

But at the same time, I want to remind you that this Commission has concluded some important actions which stand us in good stead for the future.

Firstly, **it has completed all actions under the Animal Welfare Strategy, 2012-2015.**

Three of these actions were crucial to improve enforcement:

- The Recommendation on pig welfare, adopted in 2016;
- The guidelines on animal transport, published in 2017;
- The study on best practices to protect animals at the time of killing.

#### – EU PLATFORM ON ANIMAL WELFARE

Our **EU Platform on animal welfare**, which I had the occasion to mention earlier **is now fully operational, supported by an online platform for information, advice and knowledge exchange.**

This is an excellent tool to bring stakeholders together. It enables them to support and complement the work of the Commission. It will help develop practical solutions to better enforce EU legislation.

The **two subgroups on animal transport and pigs** provide important support for EU activities in these areas.

The **four voluntary initiatives** help mobilise action on other priorities: **horses, dogs and cats, farmed fish and pullets.**

#### – EU REFERENCE CENTRES FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

As indicated, the **first EU Reference centre has recently begun its work on pig welfare.** It will provide valuable scientific, technical and educational support to improve official controls.

**A second centre will be designated by mid-2019 to focus on the welfare of rabbits, poultry and fur animals.**

#### – CONSOLIDATION OF INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

We have also consolidated our international activities. A report adopted earlier this year concluded the EU remains at the forefront of animal welfare standards globally. Under my mandate, **the World Organisation for Animal Health has adopted new international standards on animal welfare, thanks to the Commission's support.**

The report also highlights the added market value of products obtained under high animal welfare standards. We must build on these achievements. We must strengthen cooperation with international organisations and non-EU countries to improve animal welfare worldwide.

#### – PROJECT ON QUALITY CONTROLS AND INDICATORS FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

By the end of this year, the Commission's project on Quality Controls and Indicators for Animal Welfare will also be launched. It looks at whether Member States have a strategic approach to enforcing EU requirements for animal welfare on-farm.

Chairman, Honourable Members, to conclude, I want to thank the Intergroup for their ongoing and valuable collaboration on animal welfare issues. After four years of working together, you are well aware that animal welfare is a personal priority. I welcome the opportunity to exchange views and discuss progress with you. As we approach the end of this Commission's mandate, I am pleased we have been able to make some good progress on animal welfare.

– **EVALUATION OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE STRATEGY IN 2019**

As many of you are aware, following the European Court of Auditors assessment on animal welfare, the Commission will launch an evaluation of the Animal Welfare strategy in 2019. This is probably the biggest project ahead of us and I really hope that all involved stakeholders will provide their input in the process.

**The outcome of this evaluation will enable the next Commission to consider possible future activities** and I have already indicated my intention to have the issue discussed in a specific Platform group, once the evaluation is finalised.

But for now, let me say I look forward to continuing our collaboration in 2019. I welcome your views on the priorities that should be taken forward under the next mandate and wish you all a very enjoyable end of year break.