New EU animal welfare strategy discussed at European Parliament

During the Animal Welfare Intergroup held on 7 February at the European Parliament in Brussels, Commissioner John Dalli and Members of the European Parliament discussed the new EU animal welfare strategy which was published by the European Commission on 19 January 2012.

Eurogroup for Animals welcomes and supports emphasis made by Commissioner John Dalli repeatedly at this Intergroup that animal welfare represents an important business opportunity as an increasingly number of European citizens are calling for welfare-friendly products. Commissioner John Dalli also stressed the importance of finding a new EU legislative framework to include animal welfare principles for all animals as a response to the current difficulties in implementing EU animal welfare rules. This will according to him help producers focus on concrete results for the welfare of animals, such as providing changes in production systems, whilst taking into account their specific contexts and by using the most economically suitable means.

Considering the following developments on the new EU animal welfare strategy, the European Parliament will be discussing the strategy on the basis of an own-initiative report by Marit Paulsen MEP. In January Commissioner Dalli presented the Strategy to the Ministers of Agriculture who are expected to adopt Conclusions in June.

Lastly, the Danish Presidency and the Commission are organizing an International conference in Brussels this week on Wednesday 29 February and Friday 1 March to present the strategy and in particular discuss market based initiatives to improve animal welfare.

Eurogroup calls on the EU not to substitute legislation with a laissez-faire approach, letting the market take the lead. Allowing the market to operate without minimum standards coupled with ill-informed consumers is a recipe for disaster and will result in green washing, consumer fraud and continued animal suffering.

Our briefing can be found at http://eurogroupforanimals.org/files/publications/downloads/Briefing_Danish_presidency_conference.pdf

Proposed animal tests for GM food & feed testing are unscientific

Eurogroup for Animals expressed its extreme disappointment over plans unveiled by the European Commission to make animal tests obligatory for GMOs in implementing rules. This proposal goes against the latest scientific advice from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published in January this year which states that it should only be carried out on a case-by-case basis as so far has been the case.

Eurogroup is therefore urging the Commission to remove the inclusion of obligatory tests as it has a major impact on animal welfare and suffering and is not based on any sound scientific basis. The Commission should work to promote the use of non-animal alternative tests instead. In addition to this, Member States should carefully examine the draft regulation submitted by the European Commission and support rules are in line with scientific evidence.

Greece bans animals in circuses

Eurogroup is extremely delighted that the Greek government has banned the use of all animals in circuses following a successful campaign led by Greek Member Organisation GAWF, Animal Defenders International and backed by over 50 local animal protection groups across the country.

The new law adopted in plenary at the Greek Parliament last week bans all animal exhibitions and/or performances in circuses, theatres and any other similar entertaining businesses, with exceptions made for horse races, pet shops, zoos and shows.

This news comes a few weeks after the Austrian Constitutional Court dismissed a complaint against the existing ban on the keeping of wild animals in circuses in Austria, and this great victory sends a clear signal to other European Countries, especially Germany and UK on their way to implement such a ban and which no longer have any excuses for not taking the necessary actions.
A few weeks ago, the European Commission has finally sent a first warning to non compliant countries regarding the implementation of European Directive 1999/74/EC which bans the use of barren battery cages for all laying hens in the European Union since 1 January 2012. This first warning requesting for information to take action to address deficiencies in the implementation of the Directive was made in the form of letters of formal notice and was directed to Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Romania.

The concerned Member States have one month left to respond to the letter of formal notice under EU infringement procedures. If they fail to react satisfactorily, the European Commission will send a Reasoned Opinion requesting Member States to take the necessary measures to comply with the Directive within two months. In addition to that, the Food and Veterinary Office will continue to closely monitor the situation as announced in its programme of audits for 2012.

Serious Animal Welfare failures and public health threats revealed in Spanish slaughterhouses

The FVO revealed an horrifying report on the state of Spanish slaughterhouses. The report follows an audit carried out in May 2011 evaluates official controls related to slaughter and processing of fresh meat.

Significant problems with cleaning and slaughter hygiene were reported and in three slaughterhouses, major deficiencies relating to the potential contamination of meat were detected, putting at risk public health. Failures to respect animal welfare requirements laid down in Directive 93/119/EC were also noted, in particular during stunning operations.

Eurogroup is shocked by this appalling situation and urges the Spanish Competent Authority to take immediate measures to correct the deficiencies identified and prepare to implement the new Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009.

The report can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/act_getPDF.cfm?PDF_ID=9348

Ritual slaughter exemptions cause animal suffering and put consumers at risk

Recent debate in European media shows that consumers are being put at risk due to the widespread failure of EU slaughterhouses to respect European hygiene laws and Eurogroup is extremely concerned as animal welfare is also being compromised in the process. Indeed, the Annex 3 of the Regulation 853/2004, which exempts to specific hygienic process if the slaughter is carried out according to a religious rite, appears to have become the norm in many parts of the EU, putting huge numbers of consumers at risk for no reason other than economic greed by meat processors but also causing immense animal suffering.

Commission plans on possible derogation to cosmetics ban

Eurogroup and other animal welfare organisations recently met with Commissioner John Dalli to discuss plans proposed by the Commission regarding a possible derogation to the cosmetics ban on animal testing due to come into force in March 2013.

The meeting was an occasion to make our position clear, which remains unchanged. The pain, distress and suffering caused to animals used in cosmetics tests cannot be justified and therefore Eurogroup does not support any delay or derogation whatsoever to the ban.

FVO programme of audits for 2012

The FVO published its programme of audits for 2012. 23 audits with reference to animal welfare will be carried out, including those in the 14 Member States recently fingered for failing to comply with the recent ban on battery cages for hens. Regrettably, just 9% of all audits will focus on animal welfare this year whereas audits on food safety represent 71% of the whole programme.

Full details of the programme can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/inspectprog/inspecprog2012_en.pdf

New EFSA publications

The EFSA released four documents of major interest related to animal welfare issues.

Three of them will support the implementation of the new EU Animal Welfare Strategy. The first document are guidelines for risk assessment of animal welfare and will be used by EFSA to the future scientific advice it gives on risks associated with animal welfare. The document can be found at http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/2513.htm

The second and third documents are both scientific opinions on the use of animal-based measures to assess welfare of dairy cows and pig. These two opinions are the first in a series of work that will ultimately cover all farm species. To see the document on dairy cows go to http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/2554.htm and on pigs go to http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/2512.htm

The last one is a guidance for the risk assessment of food and feed derived from GM animals and can be found at http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/2501.htm

Launch of SSN Rhino Newsletter

The Species Survival Network (SSN) released its first issue of the SSN Rhino Newsletter which focuses on poaching and illegal trade in rhinos and their parts and efforts made by range States to address poaching.

To read the newsletter go to http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/inspectprog/inspectprog2012_en.pdf

Intergroup for the welfare and conservation of animals

Next Intergroup meeting on 15 March 2012

Topic for this 281th session
• Shark finning and animal welfare
• Marit Paulsen MEP on the new EU Animal Welfare Strategy

Get more details and updates at: www.animalwelfareintergroup.eu

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