EUWelNet
Coordinated European Animal Welfare Network

Coordinated European Animal Welfare Network (EUWelNet)

Deliverable 2

Title

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Abstract

Mrs. Marit Paulsen MEP opened the first plenary session. She emphasised that the pilot project was the first step on a long road towards a European Animal Welfare Network which effectively contributes to ensuring that society respects and gives dignity to animals. Harry Blokhuis then summarised the background to the project and the consortium and outlined the four work packages and the importance of the Advisory Board to seeking an optimal solution for a future network. David Pritchard explained the role and operation of the board noting that the pilot network needs to understand the various policy processes used by Member States to implement the EU Aquis on animal welfare (AW). Denis Simonin reviewed the scope and background to the network, the tender process and the importance of the project to the impact assessment for the future animal welfare law. Bettina Bock explained how social sciences studies will address the identification of bottlenecks in implementing EU laws on AW in work package 2. E-learning, workshops, standard operating procedures and training official veterinarians were all part of the knowledge transfer studies in pigs, broilers and killing in work package 3 described by Xavier Manteca. The challenges of work package 4, the overarching analysis of the outcomes of the project and making recommendations for a future European Animal Welfare Network, were outlined by Isabelle Veissier.

Small break out groups were formed of a mixture of Advisory Board members and project members to discuss a specific task following the task group leader making a short presentation outlining the task, the issues for discussion and the support required from the Advisory Board members. This proved very effective with Advisory Board members providing critical but constructive comments on proposed studies and also on how Advisory Board members could assist the project team with further information and advice. The report summarises the discussion in each group and the feedback discussion and conclusion during the second plenary session. The second meeting of the Advisory Board is preliminary planned for the last two weeks in October 2013.

1. Introduction

The background to this project is a call for proposals from the European Commission (SANCO 2012/10293) with a view to obtaining a grant for a pilot project on a Coordinated European Animal Welfare Network. A consortium led by Professor Harry Blokhuis from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, responded to this call and won the grant. The consortium has 26 partners with 16 EU countries represented. The project started 1st January 2013 for one year.

The project, now called EUWelNet, will evaluate the feasibility and usefulness of a network that could assist the competent authorities and stakeholders in implementing EU legislation on animal welfare. The concept is of a network of institutions with recognised knowledge on animal welfare, and independent from specific private interests, that could supply technical assistance, promote innovation, disseminate scientific and applied research, and take a lead in education and vocational training. Further information on this project is available at www.euwelnet.eu**.**

Veterinary Consultancy Services Limited (VCS) provided advice to the consortium during the tender and its role in the project is to run the independent Advisory Board. David Pritchard, Director VCS Ltd acts as the independent chairman of the Advisory Board with Peter Jinman as deputy. The composition of the Advisory Board was laid out in the EUWelNet Consortium's description of work. The broad-based Advisory Board reflects the project's emphasis on selected examples of EU animal welfare legislation and their implementation across all Member States. By attracting wide stakeholder input via members' networks, the Advisory Board will help ensure the transparency, relevance, validity, reach and quality of the work. Its involvement in the project will also provide the Board with a basis to make firm and independent recommendations concerning a future coordinated European animal welfare network. The arrangements for the first meeting were discussed with the Presidency triad of Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) and DGSANCO to try to optimise meeting arrangements and seek support from the CVOs of the Member States for the project. Invitation letters, registration forms and codes of practice were sent the CVOs of 27 Member States of the EU as well as Croatia, Norway and Switzerland, the EU institutions involved with animal welfare (DGSANCO, EFSA, FVO), International organisations (OIE, FAO, EUROFAWC) and European organisations representing animal and meat industries (Copa-Cogeca, EFFAB, IFAH, UECBV), veterinary and welfare science (FVE, IASE, ISAH), welfare education (EVVPH, ECAWA), welfare organisations (CIWF, Eurogroup, VierPfoten, WSPA) and European Animal Welfare Platform (FAI).

ANNEX I lists the participants attending plenary and small groups and also includes those offering support for the Project but not attending. ANNEX II contains the Invitation letters to CVOs and Institutions, Registration form, Code of practice, and Agenda. ANNEX III contains all the presentations made during the First Advisory Board meeting.

2. Summary of Session 1 Introduction to EUWelNet

Mrs. Marit Paulsen MEP recalled that the recognition of the dignity of animals and understanding their view of the world is essential to promoting human dignity. This project is

the first step on a long road towards ensuring that the EU better organises and brings together its available expertise in animal welfare to effectively support society to give dignity to animals. She noted that democracy has mainly good but also some black sides. The short term view tends to predominate because of election periods but longer time frames are needed to achieve effective measures to improve animal welfare such as a European Network. In taking the project forward she advised that all decisions are compromises. She urged the pilot project to ensure to also provide information and knowledge so that people working with animals can further develop their level of knowledge and become more competent to care for their animals and show respect and appreciate their dignity.

Harry Blokhuis, the project coordinator, provided an overview of the tender for the EUWelNet project and the development of the consortium which builds on existing networks of “Welfare Quality Network” and “AWARE” (see www.welfarequalitynetwork.net and www.aware-welfare.eu). The pilot study is just one year long and is focussed on four areas of EU law selected because of bottlenecks and difficulties for which solutions, using knowledge transfer, are anticipated. The pilot needs to complete its work to inform the future developments in the EU on animal welfare as foreseen by the EU Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2106. The call required an Advisory Board and he summarised where advice/participation of Advisory Board members is required by the project team emphasising that their advice and support was required throughout the year. The Board’s advice is essential to ensure relevant information is reviewed by the team and also to incorporate views and expertise of the Advisory Board in the project’s activities. This will enable the final report to provide information on the way forward for a future Network which can be supported by all parties and one that adds real value.

The role and operation of the board were summarised by David Pritchard. He believed that the board members should be challenging and critical but also a constructive friend of the pilot project. To meet the Board’s objectives and to provide optimal support for the project, its members would need to take an active interest in the pilot studies. The goal of improving implementation of EU legislation on animal welfare is a challenge as it requires an understanding of how best to influence the policy cycles (both scientific and other evidence), and the risk assessment and risk management systems used by Member States as well as collecting and disseminating best practice.

Denis Simonin noted that ideas of a network was not new. The Commission had made a feasibility study of a network in 2009 and the European Parliament made a resolution on 2010 followed up by a dedicated budget of one million Euros in 2012 which had led to the call for the twelve month pilot project awarded to EUWelnet. He emphasised that EUWelNet project was an important part of the impact assessment for the future animal welfare law. It would establish a network of technical, scientific and educational resources which would identify difficulties of implementation of EU law relating to insufficient knowledge. It would seek solutions based on implementation of knowledge transfer to ensure a better understanding of the legislation and make recommendations of the feasibility of a network. He confirmed that the Advisory Board was an important part of the project to both enable Member States and

stakeholders to be updated on the project and also to allow them to contribute to the project. He cautioned that the project was not a mechanism for coordinating EU research nor should it seek to duplicate the work of EFSA nor the Competent Authorities and it would not decide on the set up of a future network. He looked at the project as to promote the sharing of information on animal welfare and use of concrete examples to improve understanding. He looked forward to ideas on how knowledge transfer can be used to improve the implementation of legislation and the demonstration of the extent to which the EU can add value by improving animal welfare.

Bettina Bock explained how social sciences studies will address the identification of bottlenecks in implementing EU laws on animal welfare in work package 2. E-learning, workshops, standard operating procedures and training official veterinarians were all part of the knowledge transfer studies in pigs, broilers and killing in work package 3 described by Xavier Manteca. The challenges of work package 4, the overarching analysis of the outcomes of the project and making recommendations for a future European Animal Welfare Network, were outlined by Isabelle Veissier. David Main used electronic voting to seek the Advisory Board's view of questions that are to be used as an evaluation tool on how important it is to change certain enrichment for pigs.

3. Discussion Groups

Some 10 tasks of the pilot project were discussed by small groups as well as by the plenary following feedback of the group findings. Details of chairman and rapporteurs and members taking part in each of the ten small group discussions are at Annex I.

Each breakout group was moderated by a chairman and started with the task group leader making a short presentation outlining the task, the issues for discussion and the support required from the Advisory Board members (Available at annex III). The main points raised during the discussions in both the small groups and at the plenary session following presentation by the task leader/rapporteur are summarised below.

Discussions on Work Package 2 Bottlenecks and difficulties in implementing welfare legislation

Task 2.1: Mapping of the implementation process and procedures, identification of main difficulties and of the level of implementation achieved.

Group discussion focussed on the template for the mapping of institutional processes and its bottlenecks , which includes the following: a brief description of the animal husbandry sector and the retailing industry as well as the social context and public concern for animal welfare and NGO presence; the implementation actors, agencies and procedures; the implementation level and embeddedness in a national animal welfare policy; the presence of private regulation and animal welfare schemes; the animal welfare (public and private) training infrastructure; some information on compliance and implementation bottlenecks. The Advisory Board agreed that this is important information and helps to better understand implementation

difficulties and the relevance of knowledge strategies. They also pointed out the importance of the following: involvement of farm industry in implementation processes; presence of pushing (multi – stakeholder) groups; the causes of bottlenecks and the difficulties of interpretation of non-compliance; the need to check what can and cannot be tackled by training; how an inventory of areas of smooth implementation and best practices would help as the project could support a positive, facilitative approach to implementation

Task 2.2: Identification of bottlenecks and likely remedial measures, focusing on knowledge transfer strategies

Task 2.2 starts in May 2013 and the discussion group made an inventory of good practices of knowledge transfer, such as discussion with the target group as preparation of the implementation process; translation of guidelines into practice-oriented language; mixed training of target groups. The group also discussed which preconditions affect the success of knowledge strategies: the organisation of the sector (e.g. local training outlets); the accessibility of training (e.g. internet access, language); the perceived trustworthiness of information sources. It was agreed that training activities and courses need to be tailor-made, but that the training of mixed groups (e.g. farmers, inspectors and/or consumers) is a powerful tool to increase mutual understanding and commitment among all the important actor groups.

Additional points raised at the plenary session were the amount of resources available in Member States to organise a smooth implementation; the use of project management which can facilitate a cooperative positive approach; the importance of involving farmers and industry in the interpretation of Directives. It was emphasised that non compliance can result from causes other than lack of training. Environmental and planning regulations can hinder compliance with Animal Welfare regulations, e.g. in DK and the NL obtaining environmental licenses for the building of new group houses for sows.

Discussions on Work package 3 Knowledge transfer strategies

Task 3.1 Knowledge transfer solutions to identification of broiler farms with poor welfare

The Broiler Directive is unique in that it uses outcome data collected at abattoirs to monitor on farm welfare with feedback to stocking rates. The Directive sets a maximum stocking density of 33 kg/m2 except where owner or keeper complies with certain extra requirements. 27 Member States (MS) collect post mortem and mortality data from slaughterhouses but not in the same way. Board members criticised the use of crude mortality as it did not take account of culling for welfare reasons. The team aims to examine the processes used by Member States for data collection and make an assessment of variability in technical data. A questionnaire designed to collect information and technical data by interview was discussed.

Members of the Advisory Board raised the point that the questionnaire was too long and has some unnecessary questions; need to define sources of variation. Suggested focusing on; training of those making measurements on slaughterhouses; reasons for not adopting highest

stocking density; and ascertaining what were MS doing before the broiler directive and role of assurance schemes.

The Board recognised the need to define those processes arising as a result of the broiler Directive as well as additional measures taken by Member States and Industry relating to broiler welfare.

At plenary, the more general issue of the burden of questionnaires on recipients was raised and the project team were urged to limit requests to data essential for the pilot and where possible to coordinate questionnaires between task groups.

Task 3.2: Development of an e-learning programme to facilitate compliance with the environmental enrichment and tail docking requirements for finishing pigs

The Advisory Board gave specific feedback on the pilot baseline evaluation and the proposed on-line training. Suggestions included clearer definition of "compliance"; more precise explanation of behaviour; use visual material where possible; highlight the multi factorial nature of risk factors; the importance of trigger factors; define lesions and prevalence of lesions and provide materials to help farmers solve problems. The group also wanted clearer guidance from the Commission on "acceptable" enrichment.

The responses collated using the electronic voting during plenary session 1 indicated that the proposed questions should be useful as an evaluation tool. The group was asked how important it was to change certain enrichment. From the responses the percentage of maximum possible importance for a change in environment was calculated and ranged from 26% for clean, dry straw if used by some pigs up to 96%, when no substrate or object was provided and the pigs were manipulating dung. Ambiguous substrates (wood, wet straw, chain) scored around 80%. When pigs were not manipulating the substrate, respondents scored a higher importance for change (78% vs. 65%).

The respondents ranked risk factors in a similar order to the EFSA risk factors (2007) except for presence of tail bitten pig which was higher than expected. The majority of respondents (around 80%) correctly identified relevant non-compliance for tail docking requirements.

The plenary noted that there may be other barriers to removing docking due to uncertainty in some pig marketing chains. It also noted that it is not up to the project to decide on interpretation of the law and husbandry solutions. It is important that the keepers understand the objective of the law and maybe able to have other solutions.

Task 3.3: Group housing of pregnant sows

Three issues were discussed: content of the fact sheets and e-learning tool, methodology to evaluate the training material and dissemination of the training material. Throughout the discussion, ways to optimize the input of the Advisory Board were considered.

The content of the fact sheets and the e-learning tool as presented in the meeting was found to be adequate. It was suggested that the training material should aim at providing practical information. It was discussed whether the response of the EC to questions on the interpretation of the Directive should be included in Fact sheet 3 (addressed to official veterinarians and inspectors). It was concluded that it would be useful to do so provided the content of the Fact sheet was approved by the EC before its evaluation. It was also agreed that by the end of April 2013 the text of the three fact sheets will be forwarded to the Advisory Board for comments. The Advisory Board will also contribute to identify farms to be used as case studies in the e-learning tool.

It was suggested that the evaluation of the training material should include not only pig producers but also official veterinarians and inspectors. It was also recommended to use control and treatment groups to do the evaluation (i.e. to compare farmers or inspectors who have been trained with untrained colleagues).

The Advisory Board was prepared to contribute to the dissemination of the training material (after approval by the EC).

Task 3.4: Standard operating procedures for slaughter

Discussion focussed on 1) development of a technical network, 2) technical difficulties in implementing the Regulation, 3) identification of the main causes of the difficulties and 4) role of the technical network in the development of the SOPs.

The Pilot technical network will consist of experts from the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, The Netherlands and Spain. As it is difficult to identify experts in animal welfare at slaughter in every country, it is important to ensure the sharing of knowledge by the technical network which should harmonise the scientific support to Competent Authorities across all Member States.

The Advisory Board agreed with the team that the main causes of technical difficulties are:

a) Implementation of minimum electrical requirements for effective water bath stunning in poultry.

b) Assessing unconsciousness after mechanical stunning in cattle, electrical stunning of sheep and poultry, and gas stunning in pigs.

The main causes of the difficulties will be addressed by both a questionnaire to Competent Authorities (bottlenecks, action, guidelines, revision) and on the spot visits to 5 abattoirs for each of the 5 species to be studied. The spot visits would gather information on Animal Welfare Officers (AWO), criteria, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), scientific support, Official Veterinarians (OVs) and by direct assessment of the main difficulties of implementing the Regulation as well as the major risk factors for poor welfare.

As this small study would not be representative of the slaughter practice in EU the Board emphasised it should focus on abattoirs with some difficulties in implementing the Regulation. The aim of the whole EUWelNet project is to enlighten how the legislation is adopted, how it is applied and to define responsibilities for ensuring compliance.

The evaluation of the role of the technical network in the development of the SOPs would include the preparation of SOPs specific for each abattoir visited. Each SOP would have recommendations on: objectives; responsibilities; control measures; monitoring procedures; corrective actions; records. The Advisory Board suggested that corrective actions should include emergency measures. The group agreed that given the short period of study the focus should be on management recommendations, rather than structural changes.

The Board noted several useful sources of information on implementation of the new Regulation such as that produced by the Australian Meat Industry Council.

Discussions on Work Package 4: Overarching analysis and conditions for future network

Task 4.1 Major animal welfare players – interested in a future network

Task 4.1 identified five types of organisations as having an interest in a welfare network: Competent Authorities; Agencies in charge of controlling the enforcement of legislation; Advisory and training organisations; Organisation involved in knowledge transfer; Research organisations. The Advisory Board also suggested that Stakeholders, NGOs, supply chains and organisations developing schemes would also be interested.

A view was expressed that the future network should include both knowledge disseminators and knowledge creators.

Task 4.1 will develop a questionnaire to collect information on the role of the different types of organisations on animal welfare knowledge flow and examine how they differ in various Member States. The question was raised how a centre can be qualified to become a member of the network?

The group noted that the network should ensure that there is a two way flow of information from competent authorities to end users, the intermediate being the knowledge providers.

Competent authorities < - > Knowledge providers < - > End users

To inform the roles of various players involved in EU Countries, those involved in the 4 pieces of legislation studied in the project will be examined. It is necessary to avoid being too ‘granular’ (as there may be many small players). The Board advised that information should be gathered from competent authorities, from end users and also directly from knowledge providers.

The group found some models inspirational, e.g. mapping exercise for animal health by EFSA resulting in the Food Safety Almanac (FSA)

The assistance of the Advisory Board is needed to collect case studies such as: national or international initiatives on knowledge strategies; examples of existing network organisations (e.g. OIE network): the possible application of network analysis (as used for studying the spread of diseases) to the relationships of key players (systematic description of the links from each organisation to other players and the strength of the connection).

The plenary discussed if both knowledge providers, and knowledge disseminators could include professional trainers. The view was that in a future network the people that provide the knowledge should be invited to take part. However different strategies may be required for the Universities, for the professional trainers and also for the governments.

Task 4.2: Construction and cost/benefit analysis of scenarios for a coordinated European animal welfare network

The discussion focussed on membership of the network and on what skills would be required. Scientific, technical, knowledge transfer skills were considered as crucial for the network. Economic skills and industry representation were also mentioned.

The group concluded that the choice of persons for any network will be determined by the final objective, and this also lays down the skills required and the institutions to be represented.

The group decided to start from the assumption that the mission of the network is to make information available through best practices and scientific advice.

The group also concluded that a possible structure is a hub model with hubs located in different Member States. Each hub would be focused on a specific expertise (e.g. by species). The hub structure would work under the control of a coordinator. The hubs could be a virtual network or a physical set up, or both. In the hub model communication should be a 2 way process with information flowing in as well as out. Inward communication could provide a potential for welfare surveillance.

Benefits should be mainly considered in terms of advantages and disadvantages with related estimated costs.

Task 4.4: Determination of the effectiveness of knowledge strategies to overcome specific bottlenecks hampering implementation of EU legislation on animal welfare

The following themes were discussed: How can improved understanding of the welfare science help the outcomes? There is a value in involving stakeholders (including farmers & consumers) at all stages (e.g. participative design). There was a need to consider other issues

(food safety/security) and provide practical solutions. A network could help implementation of science and monitor its application.

A review of the knowledge spreading methods identified some critical features. Some methods are passive (web-site) and some are active (targeting farms). An active approach is important if the farm does not recognise a problem. Some methods focus on individual farmers (e.g. veterinary advice) or groups of farmers (e.g. discussion groups). Although both could be effective there are differences in resource needs. Some methods are based on official others on industry guidance (or combination). Retailers-led initiatives can also be very influential. Local "influencers" (e.g. suppliers) were also considered important as was the role of family members. There is potential for financial support from the rural development programme.

A network could have a role in sharing technical expertise and experience of initiatives. It could be active (e.g. training) or passive (linking knowledge). It could have a focussed targeted activity or a broader multi-disciplinary approach. The activity should add value by reducing duplication and filling gaps.

The plenary emphasised the need to consider other issues (food safety/security, economy) and the need to provide practical solutions. Plenary confirmed some passive knowledge spreading strategies, e.g. web-site leaflet, work if farmers recognize their problems. When farmers do not recognize their problems active targeting of specific farms is needed. Plenary noted that major benefits are expected from sharing technical expertise across countries by sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences.

Task 4.5: Collation of results leading to concrete recommendations on the conditions under which a coordinated European animal welfare network could be established

The objectives and activities of the future network were reviewed and the group agreed that the whole idea of the network is to facilitate exchanges of information and harmonisation of this information. Even if the same pool of information is used it still needs to be tailored for each country because the difficulties in implementation may vary.

The coordination requires a steering group, some money as incentive, follow-up activities, and therefore requires a central governing unit. This unit may include representatives of member states or be a specific service of the Commission. As the network is focussed on the implementation of legislation, the Competent Authority has to play a governance role.

Several alternatives for possible organisations of the network were considered: at one extreme, the network is made of an advisory committee in each country, at the other extreme, it is made of several centres per country with many interactions between centres within and between countries.

In conclusion, it will be necessary to

- Set a clear objective and added value for the network (compared to what already exists).
- Make clear who will profit from the information (Member States? Commission? Producers?)
- Make clear who is taking decisions.

4. Conclusion

Harry Blokhuis concluded that there had been very good discussions which were well informed and open. The aim of the EUWelNet Advisory Board is to draw on the experience of the members and the discussions have greatly improved both the knowledge and mutual understanding of the project partners and the Board members. This will be very useful in taking the project forward and in discussions on the future Network at the second meeting of the Advisory Board. The discussions have been very effective and we welcome the views of all the stakeholders. The project is still struggling with all the questions and to move on in the most effective and useful way the iterative process with the Advisory Board is important. He thanked the Advisory Board members for providing their expertise and their willingness to participate. He thanked the EUWelNet team for their professional and knowledgeable contributions.

David Pritchard concluded that the mix of members had provided a challenging group but thanked everyone for being both critical constructive and friendly. He thanked the EUWelNet team for their very clear presentations and their flexibility in the group discussions. The breakout groups had provided many good ideas and useful information novel to the project. The Advisory Board has really contributed to the tasks which, with their continued support, will be enhanced by this process. A potential important bottleneck in these economically difficult times are the resources available in Member States to implement EU welfare legislation and social science studies may be able to shed light on this. The economic studies should provide a framework for examining the costs and added value to be obtained by identifying the bottlenecks and resolving them by disseminating best practice at both policy and knowledge transfer levels.

The second Advisory Board meeting is scheduled for late October with a similar format using breakout groups. The Advisory Board will have available some of the main outcomes of studies for work packages 2 and 3 and be able to make some conclusions on the nature of a future network. A summary report of the first meeting will be forwarded to Board members.