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European Parliament study damns hiatus in EU animal welfare law

Large gaps leave 35% of EU animals unprotected



Science on animal welfare progresses every day. Yet, we have seen progress on EU animal welfare policies and legislation stagnating, leaving aside science and the benefits it brings to animals and humans.

A new European Parliament report demonstrates once more that this has major negative effects for animals, impairs the confidence in the EU's functioning and hence decreases the EU's reputation abroad. The study "Animal Welfare in the European Union", commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs upon request of the Committee on Petitions, clearly states this anomaly needs urgent addressing. The report specifically recommends the elaboration of a generic animal welfare law or species specific legislation.

Donald M. Broom, Emeritus Professor from the University of Cambridge, and author of the study, confirms that EU animal welfare policy and legislation has had much positive influence for animals, sustainable growth, human and animal health, biodiversity and on the competitiveness of the EU in the world. "The welfare of hundreds of millions of animals has improved as a result of EU policies and legislation. EU animal welfare policy and legislation has had much positive influence in the world. The image of the EU has been improved by this kind of legislation as it is viewed as an indicator of a civilised society" said Professor Broom at the occasion of the presentation of his study in the Parliament two weeks ago.

The development of the Union's law over the past 44 years has led to 45 legislative acts relating to animal health and welfare. These legislative results culminated in the crucial acknowledgement of animals as sentient beings and the moral implications this brings as laid down in the TFEU, a fundamental value which should underlie all EU legislation. However in the majority of EU law, animals are only recognised as goods, products or possessions.

Last years' special Eurobarometer demonstrated a groundswell of European citizen's support to better protect all animal species. This mirrors the many animal welfare petitions the Petitions Committee has received over the past decade. However, despite the existence of scientific evidence and this strong moral support from EU citizens, current EU legislation excludes several important farmed species.

Most notably, there is no legislation for 340 million farmed rabbits, 170 million ducks, 150 million turkeys, 83 million sheep, 10 million goats, 88 million bovines (with the exclusion of calves kept for veal production). The second and third most farmed species, salmon and trout (1 billion and 440 million, respectively), are also not protected by any legislation.

Wild and working animals including equids and companion animals too are left by the wayside as their welfare is not protected. Deliberate or commercially-motivated cruelty to wild animals is not prevented by the existing EU legislation. The use of traps for wild animals that result in severe suffering - such as glue traps and snares - is still permitted in the EU.

The study also recognises that most wild animals cannot adapt to a life in captivity and underlines that the trade and keeping of exotic pets can result in poor welfare and risks to biodiversity conservation. It stresses that the adoption of legislation including (positive) lists of allowed pet species could tackle these issues. Moreover the keeping and training of animals in circuses is identified as one of the priorities for new EU legislation, as it is consistent public concern across the EU.

Reineke Hameleers, Director of Eurogroup for Animals embraces the findings by emphasizing that *"This study shows the European Commission's current approach, with an exclusive focus on information exchange and enforcement of existing EU legislation is valuable but not a substitute for completing legislation that is urgently needed. The current legislative paralysis is hugely detrimental to the quality and effectiveness of EU law, the confidence of citizens and the welfare of individual animals. We trust that the report will open the eyes of policy and decision makers and convince them of the need to take action, now"*.

While the report rightly emphasises how existing EU animal welfare legislation contributed substantially to improve the lives of many species, it also stressed that implementation and enforcement frequently remains problematic, such as for Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport, which Broom agrees needs revision to deliver real impact for animals across the EU.

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1. Eurogroup for Animals represents 54 animal advocacy organisations in 24 EU Member States, the USA, Australia, Serbia and Norway. Since its inception in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the EU to adopt higher legal standards for animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals reflects public opinion through its membership organisations' affiliations across the Union, and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on issues relating to animal welfare. For more information, please visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org
2. Prof. Broom's full report can be found [here](#).
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