

This draft document constitutes the first draft at developing a future strategy on Animal Welfare. The document will be informed by discussion at the conference and the feedback from the various stakeholders.

# **A NEW ANIMAL WELFARE STRATEGY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

**PRESENTED AT ANIMAL WELFARE CONFERENCE**

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Bia agus Mara**  
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## **1. Introduction**

The welfare of animals is an important and growing global societal concern. This relates to all animals, and especially in respect of those kept under the control – for whatever purpose - of people in society. In this regard, Ireland is no different. This is reflected in a 2015 Eurobarometer study which confirms that very high numbers of our citizens see animal welfare as an important issue.

Animals are sentient beings which means that they can feel pain and distress and are capable of being aware of their surroundings and relationships with other animals and humans. These experiences are important and it matters to us as a society how animals are treated.

These societal concerns will continue to evolve. Citizens understanding and beliefs regarding animal welfare are increasingly informed by social media as well as mainstream media coverage. In relation to animal welfare, some practices that may have been acceptable to society in the past are no longer considered acceptable as new research findings and new information become available. Advocates for improving the welfare of animals in different scenarios and in a general sense have exerted influence across society. Increased media coverage of animal welfare issues clearly stems from rising concern amongst the population at large, both domestically and internationally about these matters. It is especially important however that accurate and reliable information and data relating to animal welfare matters inform citizens. Where there are new and or conflicting views, it is important that discussions and indeed debate are conducted in a respectful way using informed scientific based approach.

Such societal concerns were a significant driver in enacting the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. A previously conducted public consultation clearly pointed to the need for change. The Act, which focuses on early intervention with strong enforcement powers where deemed necessary, marked a significant step forward in the legislative framework in Ireland, responding to the increased social concerns for animal welfare. The legislation previously in place in the area of animal welfare, largely dating back to 1911, was simply no longer appropriate to 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

## **2. Why an Animal Welfare Strategy now?**

Whilst very good progress has been made on the legislative front with excellent assistance from Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and other stakeholders in inspection and controls, it is considered timely to bring forward a strategy on Animal Welfare that projects forward over the next decade. Up to now approaches to the subject have tended to be ad hoc and issue led rather than

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following a strategic vision. Arising from the introduction of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 all animals, farmed and companion animals of all types including leisure, sport and working animals, were formally brought under the one legislative framework. The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine was assigned sole responsibility within government for policy matters relating to animal welfare. This consolidation of responsibility and the clarity in respect of the scope of the legislation, to include animals kept for food production and those kept for companionship and recreational purposes represents a positive development, which facilitates the development and co-ordination of the delivery of a national Strategy.

In the development of a national Animal Welfare Strategy, we are informed by developments in other countries across the world. In the first instance our involvement with this issue at EU level has been important and in particular to the ongoing work of the OIE (the World Organisation for Animal Health). The OIE has been very proactive in bringing about improved welfare outcomes in various regions around the globe.

Ireland has partnered with the OIE in supporting its animal welfare activities on the global stage. An example of one of its programmes is the development of 'Whole Journey Scenario' workshops with the objective of assisting countries implement best practices during long distance and cross border animal transport in compliance with standards set by the OIE, with the goal of improving the welfare of animals for the whole duration of the journey involving countries along the specific route.

Taking these national and international drivers of change into account, it is considered timely to bring forward an Animal Welfare Strategy.

### ***3. Definition of Animal Welfare***

In terms of achieving clarity of purpose, the first principle is to have a clear understanding of what we mean by animal welfare. Many different stakeholders have varying understandings and/or perceptions of what animal welfare means. This has been subject to much scientific research, thinking and debate over the years. There have been a number of evolving schools of thought which have advocated the importance of different aspects - the physical state of the animal (health, nutrition, free from injury), its mental state (apprehension, fear) and the environment in which it is kept approximating its 'natural living' environment. It is now generally accepted that the well-being and thus the welfare of an animal comprises the state of the animal's body and mind, and the extent

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to which its nature (genetic traits manifest in breed and temperament) is satisfied. However, these three aspects of welfare sometimes conflict, and this presents practical and ethical challenges.

In developing a definition upon which this strategy is based we propose to commence the process by working with that which has been developed by the OIE, as set out in its Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

*'Animal Welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare\_ if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing. Animal\_welfare refers to the state of the animal;*

The OIE goes on to state that the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.

The OIE provide the following reflections on their approach to animal welfare which are also illustrative:

1. That there is a critical relationship between animal health and animal welfare.
2. That the internationally recognised 'Five Freedoms' provided valuable guidance in animal welfare.
3. That the internationally recognised 'three Rs' (**R**eduction in numbers of animals, **R**efinement of experimental methods and **R**eplacement of methods which avoid or replace the use of animals in research) provide valuable guidance for the use of animals in science. In addition their aim is to improve animal welfare and scientific quality where the use of animals cannot be avoided.
4. That the scientific assessment of animal welfare involves diverse elements which need to be considered together, and that selecting and weighing these elements often involves value-based assumptions which should be made as explicit as possible.
5. That the use of animals in agriculture and science, and for companionship, recreation and entertainment, makes a major contribution to the wellbeing of people.

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6. That the use of animals carries with it an ethical responsibility to ensure the welfare of such animals to the greatest extent practicable.
7. That improvement in farm animal welfare can often improve productivity and food safety, and hence lead to economic benefits.
8. That equivalent outcomes based on performance criteria, rather than identical systems based on design criteria, be the basis for comparison of animal welfare standards and recommendations.

#### **4. Perspectives on Animal Welfare**

As can be seen from the OIE definition, there are a number of perspectives to be taken into account when considering animal welfare.

For a while now the baseline for what animal welfare means in the context of Irish animal welfare policy is the Five Freedoms. These heavily informed the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 and are listed as follows.

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
4. Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

The Five Freedoms were developed in 1979 to better understand and inform the then developing issue of animal welfare. They are the base rock upon which modern considerations in respect of the welfare of animals are based. . These have brought a valuable focus and cohesion to much of the debate over recent years on animal welfare. There has however been further evolution of research and thinking bringing forward alternative approaches that have sought to further enhance and develop the Five Freedoms. The Five Freedoms however remain “timeless principles”<sup>1</sup>, this is borne out by the fact that many of the alternative perspectives of welfare consider many of the same basic

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<sup>1</sup> John Webster, “Animal Welfare: Freedoms, Dominions and “A Life Worth Living”, Animals 2016.

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factors. However the Five Freedoms can be seen by some as overly simplistic or lacking depth. In particular they are a snapshot in time and so tend to ignore long term aspects of animal husbandry and also do not attempt to arrive at an overall view of the welfare status in terms of mental state. To remedy this, the Five Freedoms are complemented by the Five Domains concept which seeks to assess the impact of the physical and social environment on the mental state of a sentient animal. The Five Domains are made up of four input categories: nutrition, environment, health and behaviour. The fifth domain being the mental state that represents the outcome for the animal expressed in terms of negative and positive experiences which thereby determine its welfare status. Whilst the objective evaluation of an animal's mental state is not readily open to evaluation, the concept clearly lends itself towards evidence based conclusions in the animal welfare sphere.

A third approach is that of Quality of Life – often termed 'A Life Worth Living' perspective - which seeks to look at all these factors as a totality over the lifetime of an animal. It recognises that animals have both positive and negative experiences and focuses on a balance between them. This cannot, and should not be, taken as a simple trade off, that enough positives outweigh a major negative. There should always be action to remedy a negative situation. This is an approach that ultimately rests on value judgements being made by human owners/keepers. Therefore it could be a useful tool when it comes to animal welfare in specific situations, for instance, where a veterinarian is communicating the validity of the available options with the owner of an elderly but unwell pet animal in relation to its quality of life. It could also be used as a basis for ranking overall animal welfare standards within quality assurance schemes.

All these different perspectives overlap on some of the same vital issues such as feeding, care and veterinary care, but view matters from a somewhat different starting point.

There is an acceptance too that the welfare of animals and the welfare of humans are closely linked. The *One Welfare* concept builds on the *One Health* initiative by advancing the relationship between human and animal health to include human wellbeing and animal welfare. *One Welfare* involves bringing together various disciplines, including social scientists, human health professionals, veterinary professionals and agricultural scientists to work collectively on animal welfare, and human wellbeing. This has particular relevance in seeking to better understand the positive two-way inter-relationship and inter-dependency between animals and their owners/keepers where, if these break down, it has the potential for very negative health and welfare outcomes for both animals and humans.

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### **5. Vision and Strategic Outcomes**

In developing this national strategy it is beneficial that we establish a high level vision as to what the ultimate objective of the strategy is – to guide the development of strategic objectives and actions necessary to achieve these objectives.

It is proposed that the Vision is that

Ireland becomes increasingly recognised as a country that promotes and assures the welfare of all animals.

We will drive toward this Vision by working on a number of specific strategic outcomes:

- a) Supporting Excellence Standards – While simultaneously ensuring minimum acceptable standards are enforced Ireland will support initiatives whereby many animals are housed and cared for in even better ways.
- b) Ireland will be fully engaged at the centre of the international dialogue about best practice in animal welfare.
- c) It becomes the norm that everyone dealing with animals is trained or educated to an appropriate level.
- d) Ireland becomes better recognised for its high level of animal welfare standards.
- e) Improved animal welfare outcomes will ultimately benefit the economics of farming

### **6. Overarching Strategic Principles**

The following sections set out five overarching principles which will provide the framework by which we will seek to develop the necessary actions to deliver on these strategic objectives. This reflects the fact that the purpose of this document is not just to set out a simple list of what we intend or desire to see across Ireland as a whole but to set out principle of how we will go about working toward Ireland's animal welfare vision.

#### **A. Roles and Responsibilities.**

Animal owners and keepers carry the primary responsibility in ensuring the welfare of the animals under their care. Good animal welfare can be assured and many animal welfare problems can be avoided through better forward planning – to include gaining a good knowledge of an animal's

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physical, behavioural and nutritional needs, the ability to recognise when an animal is healthy and when not, the selection of an animal in the context of available resources to provide for them, acquiring specific husbandry skills and knowledge and planning for adverse events. It is well recognised that animal husbandry has a major role to play in the welfare of farmed animals and indeed all animals kept under human control.

Other actors – including those involved in the trade of animals, in the transport of animals, in the development and the provision of advice regarding livestock production systems, in the design of animal housing facilities, in the organisation of competitions involving animals, in the use of animals for show or performance, in the use of animals for scientific research and education, in animal husbandry and production education, in wildlife management, in hunting and pest control activities, in the slaughter and killing of animals, in the rescue and sheltering of animals, as well as those involved in policy development across these sectors - all have a responsibility to ensure that they meet moral, ethical and particular specific legislative obligations regarding the welfare of animals in the context within which they operate.

For its part Government will continue to play a key role in setting and updating Animal Welfare Standards. It will continue to promote and prioritise when appropriate research into certain aspects of animal welfare and will work closely with Stakeholders in optimising welfare outcomes.

#### **B. Working in Partnership/Coordination amongst Stakeholders.**

Working in partnership requires a mechanism where the views and contribution of all relevant stakeholders are shared and taken into consideration in the development of policies, in the evolution and development of standards, guidelines and codes of practice and in the formation of legislation. Working in partnership also requires clarity and acknowledgement of the roles of respective stakeholders and acceptance by all of the responsibilities associated with such roles.

The Farmed Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (FAWAC), the IPAAG (Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group) and the Greyhound Forum all play an important role in bringing stakeholders together.

#### **C. Focus on Scientific and Evidence based Animal Welfare Research.**

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Evidence based policy requires that it be rooted in and informed by good quality science. Our understanding of animals physiognomy and responses to stimulus has increased greatly over the years. There has been increased work carried out in the scientific and academic community that provides robust and scientifically sound information which can inform policy making. The existing national framework to assess such matters is the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, supported by experts within the DAFM, academia and state agencies. This committee will continue to play an important role in

- a) Identifying areas where greater knowledge is needed to provide a sound scientific basis for policy,
- b) Advising such that relevant research can be done in the most appropriate institutional framework and
- c) Interpreting the outcome of such research and advising policy makers on relevance and applicability of such research.

We are also informed on such matters by outputs from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

This approach has proved useful in making sure that animal welfare policies are informed by good evidence. There are many situations where welfare issues are clear but equally there are other aspects that are not always immediately obvious, where different techniques could apply or where so-called “common sense” views differ. In such instances an evidence-based and informed evaluation to shape the discussion towards a conclusion is the best way forward.

#### **D. Improved Measurement of Strategic Implementation**

Measurement is important to ensure we can establish a basis for demonstrating effective progress toward our strategic outcomes. Measurement is also important because welfare is a multi faceted issue over which there is not always agreement. From a policy perspective it is therefore necessary to have a consistent approach to measurement/evaluation to identify a need for intervention, to monitor progress towards our strategic objectives and to measure impact of newly introduced measures on animal welfare outcomes.

Measurements of animal welfare should be as holistic as possible, taking into account the various prisms of physical, mental and the ‘living environment’. This however is not easy, given the varying

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degrees of difficulty in measuring each and in achieving the appropriate balance between the three parameters.

For instance, objective physical measures such as space per animal or use of medicines are relatively straightforward to measure and demonstrate however they are only indirect indicators in respect of the welfare of an animal. They measure inputs (things that are provided for the animal - the spatial environment in which an animal is expected to exist or an indicator of the health of an animal) - rather than welfare outcomes – they do not measure the actual well-being of the animal taking all potential impacting factors into consideration. It is well recognised that husbandry skills and competencies greatly influence the welfare outcome, irrespective of the variations in system inputs. Identified deficiencies in respect of some of these indicators, such as disease, are useful as triggers to prompt possible follow up investigations. Similarly behavioural assessment can be difficult to standardise as the subjectivity of the individual assessor and repeatability of the assessment needs to be taken into account. Recent research projects such as ‘Welfare Quality’, and subsequent work by associated researchers have sought to develop usable tools to consistently measure animal based indices to help in this area.

#### **E. Enhanced, sensitive fair and robust enforcement**

To date there have been in excess of 50 successful prosecutions brought under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 since its commencement in 2014. While robust enforcement ultimately leading to a Court appearance and sentencing is critical to send out a strong message that animal cruelty is not to be countenanced, there are many situations where the issuance of a Notice under the Act have brought about the desired improvement in the animal’s welfare. Indeed there are also instances where the health and well being of the owners have had a significant role in the evolution of particular animal welfare compromising situations and where the holistic engagement of various animal and human health/ welfare services – as described in the ‘One Welfare’ concept have been engaged.

The Early Warning System (EWS) established by DAFM on foot of a recommendation from the Farmed Animal Advisory Council plays an important role in dealing with these sensitive situations. It involves a nationwide collaborative approach involving farming associations, DAFM personnel, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals and the HSE. The EWS arranges for relevant

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agencies and bodies or individuals known to the farmer to undertake timely interventions in advance of welfare problems becoming acute.

Overall arrangements in the area of enforcement have been working well but will continue to be refined and developed and require continued collaboration and coordination from the various stakeholders involved. Given the diverse range of areas and types of animal husbandry a risk based approach should inform enforcement so that those areas or types of animal most in need are prioritised.

### **7. Strategic Actions - towards of achieving our Strategic Outcome**

The strategic outcomes that we hope to achieve require specific actions if we are to achieve these. In this regard, in the context of this draft we set out below for consideration some possible strategic activities.

1. We will work on the development of new and updated Codes of Practice for various sectors which will play a key role in developing and codifying agreed welfare standards for the various sectors.
2. The Scientific Advisory Committee on AHW will continue to play a key role in advising on the development of welfare policies in Ireland.
3. Specific education initiatives in the area of animal husbandry will be enhanced by examining the impact and effectiveness of urban horse projects and studying their applicability elsewhere.
4. Changes to research agenda both in academic institutions and Teagasc to ensure animal welfare is given due note in areas of research around animal health and animal husbandry.
5. Develop new research work directly in animal welfare areas of particular relevance to Ireland.
6. At both state and academic level, we will work in partnership with the OIE and the EU Commission to assist our partner countries improve animal welfare standards.
7. We will continue to develop a framework of close collaboration with the various stakeholder groups.

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8. Both the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) and the Early Warning System (EWS) will be strengthened in particular by new formal arrangements with the Department of Health and HSE.
9. A Welfare Advisory Council in respect of non farmed animals will be established.
10. Quality Assurance Schemes will be adapted in order to improve their ability to meet societal concern on animal welfare.
11. Examine the Early Warning System so as to review and establish best practice and to assemble and compare results and experience from different regions.
12. Ensuring that the various strands of animal welfare enforcement work in a coherent and effective manner.
13. A regular reporting framework will be established setting out the major developments in the area of animal welfare.

#### **8. Conclusion – Next Steps in Strategic Development**

This document has been drawn up for purposes of consultation on a possible strategic direction rather than a legislative or policy review and therefore it would be useful if contributions and reactions were guided by the following points/questions:

- Have we reflected the most relevant perspectives in respect of animal welfare research and theory in section 4?
- Does the vision for animal welfare show the correct level of ambition?
- Should there be greater focus on the role of other and non state organisations and institutions?
- Are the Strategic Principles correct?
- Is the balancing approach on enforcement appropriate and correct?
- What areas of research should be considered for animal welfare?