

# Animal protection: implementation by the Community of the agreement on international humane trapping standards

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution backing the rapporteur Karin **SCHEELE** (PES, AT), and rejected a draft directive on the trapping of certain animal species designed to bring EU law into line with international agreements reached with Russia, Canada and the United States. The report was referred back to the Committee.

The rapporteur argued that the draft directive was 'very unsatisfactory' and 'difficult to improve by means of amendments'. In addition, she said, the text lacked any proper scientific basis.

To recall, in 1996, the Community concluded two identical agreements on the trapping of certain animal species, firstly with Russia and Canada and then with the United States. The Council approved the agreements in 1998 but, because national laws continued to differ, the Commission proposed that a directive be adopted to harmonise these laws and thus enable the European Union to comply with these agreements. The draft directive does not cover leghold traps, which have been banned since 1991. The aim is to regulate other traps, for example, drowning traps, to make them less cruel. The agreements and the draft directive cover 19 species (muskrat, marten, sable, badger, wolf, beaver, otter, etc.).

In June 1997, meanwhile, Parliament condemned by a large majority the agreement concluded with Canada and Russia because it did not take sufficient account of animal welfare and was primarily motivated by trade considerations.

The use of the term 'humane' in the title of the directive was strongly contested by some members of the Parliament, particularly the Socialist, Green and GUE/NGL groups. It was also queried by the Commission's own Scientific and Veterinary Committee, which maintained that the international agreements do not rule out unacceptable levels of suffering.

However, a large majority vote in of the Parliament was achieved partly because of an alliance between contradictory points of view, between those who thought the directive too weak and those who believed it went too far. Some, including a number of Dutch Members, did not want the directive to hinder the fight against certain harmful animals, in particular the muskrat, which constantly threatens the dykes that protect the regions of the Netherlands below sea level.

Commissioner DIMAS said the Commission would now have to reflect on the best way of moving forward.