

The protection and welfare of animals for 2006-2010

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Elizabeth JEGGLE (EPP-ED, DE) in response to the Commission communication proposing a Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006 - 2010. The report took as its basic premise that "animals are sentient beings whose specific needs must be taken into account", and that "the protection of animals is an expression of humanity in the 21st century and a challenge facing European civilisation and culture".

The committee therefore supported the Commission's plans and pointed to the greater emphasis already placed on animal protection under the Common Agricultural Policy, although it regretted that European policy on animal welfare had so far focused almost exclusively on the welfare and protection of farm animals.

MEPs stressed that "animal protection and animal health impact closely on each other." They therefore called on the Commission to "take greater account of animal protection aspects in the fight against animal diseases." However, they also recognised that higher standards may come at a cost, and argued that, when introducing higher animal protection welfare standards, the situation of individual EU regions should be taken into account. And they were keen for measures to improve animal welfare to be seen "from the standpoint of their socio-economic effects", especially on farmers. The committee also urged the Commission to push at international level, "notably at the WTO and the OIE" (the world organisation for animal health), for a single legislative standard for animal protection rules.

MEPs said that "consumers should be informed and prepared to pay higher prices for products originating from farms with higher animal welfare standards and that these products should be appropriately labelled". They supported the development of an 'EU label' as well as voluntary private labels that would guarantee even higher standards of animal protection and which could spread animal welfare standards around the world. They even suggested imposing levies on products which do not meet EU standards of animal welfare, to avoid "animal protection dumping".

Lastly, the committee called on the Commission to propose a total import ban on seal products and 'cruelty products' from third countries, such as fur from animals skinned alive, fur from animal breeding farms with no veterinary control and pharmaceutical products based on endangered species. And it urged the European Community to bring an end to dog, bull and cock fighting.