Basic information

2016/2077(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits **Subject** 3.10.04.02 Animal protection	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development	ECK Stefan (GUE/NGL)	23/02/2016
	Shadow rapporteur POLČÁK Stanislav (PPE) KADENBACH Karin (S&D) KUŹMIUK Zbigniew (ECR) ROHDE Jens (ALDE) HÄUSLING Martin (Verts/ALE) ZULLO Marco (EFDD) LOISEAU Philippe (ENF)	

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Agriculture and Rural Development	ANDRIUKAITIS Vytenis Povilas

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
12/05/2016	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
25/01/2017	Vote in committee		
30/01/2017	Committee report tabled for plenary	A8-0011/2017	Summary
13/03/2017	Debate in Parliament		
14/03/2017	Decision by Parliament	T8-0077/2017	Summary
14/03/2017	Results of vote in Parliament		
14/03/2017	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2016/2077(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AGRI/8/06481

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE587.419	18/07/2016	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE589.149	19/09/2016	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A8-0011/2017	30/01/2017	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T8-0077/2017	14/03/2017	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2017)390	22/08/2017	

Minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits

2016/2077(INI) - 30/01/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the own-initiative report by Stefan ECK (GUE/NGL, DE) on minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits.

Members recalled that the majority of rabbits are farmed for meat production, with over **340 million rabbits slaughtered for meat ever year**.

There are grave concerns regarding the poor welfare, high stress levels and high mortality and morbidity rates of farm rabbits in Europe.

The report suggested **phasing out battery and barren wire cages in rabbit farming**, and make the conversion to alternative methods of rabbit farming such as park farming or hutch systems, with grass as the main feed, which improve the comfort and welfare of farmed rabbits.

Member States and the Commission are called upon to undertake **further research** for the purpose of finding the best possible housing systems to improve animal welfare in different types of farming and to **preserve the quality and safety of rabbit meat imports** by undertaking thorough controls and inspections when these imports enter the Union.

Rabbit rearing: Members expressed concern that rabbits reared and fattened for meat production in the EU are kept in old-fashioned cages which do not conform to modern farming requirements. Rabbits are extremely sensitive animals and can suffer from a wide range of welfare problems and diseases caused by inappropriate breeding conditions. Few therapeutic tools are available to rabbit farmers and veterinarians to tackle the health problems that arise.

The report pointed out that rabbits weaned for fattening and does kept in alternative collective park systems, which typically provide 750 cm²/rabbit for growers and 800 cm²/rabbit for does, benefit from more space for movement. However, such systems will cause farms to incur costs, which needs to be taken into account by providing financial assistance to farmers who opt for this system for raising rabbits.

Transport and slaughtering: given that transport is a stressful experience for rabbits, Members stressed that rabbits should be fed and watered before long-distance transport and be provided with adequate food, water and space in transit, and that **transport times should be as limited as possible**. Moreover, rabbits should be fully stunned before slaughter.

Antimicrobial resistance: due to species-specific diseases and the high mortality rate inherent to rabbit farming, widespread routine administration of antibiotics has become a necessity, which can lead to an increase in antimicrobial resistance.

Members stressed that **antibiotics must be used only for treatment purposes** and should be followed by the appropriate withdrawal period before slaughter. Member States should be encouraged to gradually phase out the use of conventional battery cages across the EU.

In conclusion, the report encouraged the Commission, in the light of the high number of rabbits being farmed and slaughtered in the EU and the severe animal welfare implications of the systems currently used for keeping rabbits, to draw up a **roadmap** towards financially sustainable minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits. This roadmap should consist, as a minimum, of:

- the drafting of guidelines containing good practices and establishing animal welfare rules for rabbits;
- a Commission recommendation, taking into consideration existing national measures, containing, where appropriate, proposals for a common EU approach, in particular with regard to rabbit health, welfare and housing.

Lastly, the report encouraged Member States and the Commission to give **dedicated budgetary support** in order to undertake scientific research into health of farm rabbits, taking into account the request for a move towards other systems of production.

Minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits

2016/2077(INI) - 14/03/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 410 votes to 205, with 59 abstentions, a resolution on minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits.

An alternative motion for a resolution, tabled by the EPP group, was rejected in plenary by 235 votes to 388, with 62 abstentions.

Parliament recalled that the majority of rabbits are farmed for meat production, with over **340 million rabbits slaughtered for meat ever year**. There are grave concerns regarding the poor welfare, high stress levels and high mortality and morbidity rates of farm rabbits in Europe.

The resolution suggested:

- phasing out battery and barren wire cages in rabbit farming, and make the conversion to **alternative methods of rabbit farming such as park farming** or hutch systems, with grass as the main feed, which improve the comfort and welfare of farmed rabbits;
- undertaking **further research** for the purpose of finding the best possible housing systems to improve animal welfare;
- **preserving the quality and safety of rabbit meat imports** by undertaking thorough controls and inspections when these imports enter the Union.

Rabbit rearing: given that rabbits are extremely sensitive animals and can suffer from a wide range of welfare problems and diseases caused by inappropriate breeding conditions, it is necessary to increase efforts tackle the lack of research and investment in medicines.

Members pointed out that rabbits weaned for fattening and does kept in alternative collective park systems, which typically provide 750 cm²/rabbit for growers and 800 cm²/rabbit for does, benefit from more space for movement. However, such systems will cause farms to incur costs, which needs to be taken into account by providing financial assistance to farmers who opt for this system for raising rabbits.

The resolution stated that any compulsory measure initiated will have to be backed up by the **budget necessary to support rabbit breeders**. A specific heading should be included for the purpose of promoting the consumption of rabbit meat.

Moreover, the Commission is invited to use **scientific evidence and findings** as the basis when proposing measures for housing requirements for breeding does and for rabbits reared for meat production.

Transport and slaughtering: Parliament stressed that rabbits should be fed and watered before long-distance transport and be provided with adequate food, water and space in transit, and that transport times should be as limited as possible. Moreover, rabbits should be fully stunned before slaughter.

Antimicrobial resistance: due to species-specific diseases and the high mortality rate inherent to rabbit farming, widespread routine administration of antibiotics has become a necessity, which can lead to an increase in antimicrobial resistance.

Parliament stressed that **antibiotics must be used only for treatment purposes** and should be followed by the appropriate withdrawal period before slaughter. It emphasised that reducing the use of antibiotics, can only be achieved if stronger emphasis is placed on the management and monitoring of rabbit farms.

In the light of the high number of rabbits being farmed and slaughtered in the EU and the severe animal welfare implications of the systems currently used for keeping rabbits, Parliament suggested drawing up a **roadmap** towards financially sustainable minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits. This roadmap should consist, as a minimum, of:

- the drafting of guidelines containing good practices and establishing animal welfare rules for rabbits;
- a Commission recommendation, taking into consideration existing national measures, containing, where appropriate, proposals for a common EU approach, in particular with regard to rabbit health, welfare and housing.

Lastly, the resolution encouraged Member States and the Commission to give **dedicated budgetary support** in order to undertake scientific research into health of farm rabbits, taking into account the request for a move towards other systems of production.