

Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare

Minutes of Meeting

Date: 16th March 2022

Venue: Webex

Meeting Time: 14.30 – 16.30

Attendee's:

Seán O'Laoide (Chair), Patricia Reilly (DAFM), Sean Murray (DAFM), Catherine Lawler (DAFM), Aiden Maguire (DAFM), Conor Dowling (ISPCA), Claire Owens (DSPCA), Jim Stephens (IKC), Karla Dunne (Dogs Trust), Maureen Byrne – (Association of Dogs Trainers Ireland), Rory Breathnach (UCD), Siobhan Mullen (UCD), Christina Conneely (Irish Blue Cross), Sarah Lynch (Dogs Trust), Clare Meade (Cat Hospital).

As there were members in attendance that were not present at the introduction meeting, the Chair requested introductions:

Christina Conneely is the CEO of Irish Blue Cross and standing in for Una O'Toole. Sarah Lynch is with Dogs Trust since 2016 and is the Policy, Compliance, and Research manager. Catherine Lawler is an SVI for DAFM and previously worked in the live trade division.

Jim Stephens from IKC attended for Sean Delmar who sent his apologies. Jim is the Chair of the Health & Welfare Committee. He is also the consultant on canine behavior and has worked with both ISPCA and DSPCA in regard to this. Jim sits on European committees for dog trainer standards including assistance dogs.

1. Minutes and Action points from previous meeting

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed

Action Points – Siobhan Mullen will give a presentation on Animal Welfare and Ethics.

DAFM circulated the animal welfare commitments in the Programme for Government and the Animal Welfare Strategy 2021-2025.

2. Discussion on issues for the Council going forward

DAFM advised that Minister McConalogue is requesting input From the Council and topics for consideration are:

- Ear cropping in dogs
- Extreme breeding – brachycephalics (canine & feline)
- Breeding, sale, ownership etc of exotic pets, regulation of pet shops
- Broad education aspect to responsible pet ownership

DAFM added that FAWAC in the past have provided guidance documents, recommendations, and advice for the Minister. This Council can provide something similar but more emphasis on the provision of advice.

On ear cropping, DAFM advised that the proposed legislation is being drafted at present. Currently cropping is illegal but very difficult to prosecute. DAFM are looking at how this is dealt with in member states and worldwide. One option is phasing out owning a dog with cropped ears and prohibiting showing of cropped dogs.

On extreme breeding DAFM noted the Norwegian policy or other existing models could be considered as an approach.

The Chair suggested a round table discussion on these topics.

- In relation to ear cropping, the IKC noted an increase in the prevalence of these dogs. The puppy trade between Ireland and the UK has seen an increase in cropped dogs also. Certain breeds of dogs are being over bred purely for monetary value with no welfare priorities for the animals. In Germany in the last few years the breeding club for the French Bulldog registered 360 litters and 3,000 nonregistered in a year. IKC work closely with vets in addressing the problem but on average only represent 25% of puppies bred in the country.
- The general feeling was we need to communicate and educate all dog owners, public and breeders.
- It was noted that there is a need to look at the services available to the person who purchases the pet. A public campaign on what's right and wrong, keep it simple. Similar to what was done with tail-docking and neutering.
- The setting of standards for registered trainers was discussed. Knowledge is needed before they become a breeding establishment also.
- It was discuss that ear cropping can have a long-lasting effect with behavioural problems and long term impact on the animal as well as the owner. One of the reasons given for the rise is that the eastern European population is growing and that they are bringing their cropped dogs with them. There seem to be more cropped dogs being rehomed than brachycephalics.
- In relation to brachycephalics, it was agreed that the public need to be brought on board rather than stigmatise owners. We need to research what the most

responsible approach to breeding. DAFM are seeing more correspondence coming in about brachycephalics fertility clinics. Veterinary Council have been informed of this. It was suggested that the Council should draft recommendations for the Minister.

- UK have a grading system for brachycephalics so they can selectively breed it out rather than ban it. The ear cropping issues are coming in through the animal welfare helpline and through engagement with the ISPCA.
- The ISPCA feel that education is the big thing, but the majority of people know it's illegal. Suggested amending legislation on importing them or phase them out. Enforcement is very difficult.
- The veterinary council are currently investigating some AI clinics.
- It was put forward that there is the dog and cat licensing system in Germany which could it be utilised here. There are similar systems used in Switzerland and Spain. This is done through education and the owner needs to get trained in respect to the dog they have before they can get a license.
- Noncompliance is a big issue here and the licensing is for the local authorities and microchipping is DAFM.
- Feral cats are a big problem and should they not be treated the same as a companion cat. TNR is helping is this but more needs to be done in certain areas of the country where it's a bigger issue
- Looking at the AI clinics, some procedures being carried out may be illegal. It was suggested to look at the Act of veterinary medicine and maybe bring in a S.I. in legislation.

In relation to equines, it was put to members if these should be under the remit of the Council. It was generally agreed that horses would will be mainly FAWAC ambit unless specific issues arise regarding companion horses.

3. Presentation - Animal Welfare and Ethics – Siobhan Mullen

Presentation attached.

4. Draft Terms of Reference

Quorum was decided at 50%.

5. Date of next meeting

Next meeting in person in April/May. The Chair and Sean will circulate. Alternate between Dublin and Portlaoise.

AOB

- **Action:** For next meeting gather up our own notions of responsible pet ownership message and what DAFM and stakeholders can bring to the table. To get actions out of the council is the challenge.
- What message we are sending out in a national campaign, funded by DAFM. How do we market the message?
- Any pets coming in from Ukraine contact live trade division in DAFM. Also, colleagues on the Polish border are helping with vaccinations. Only for pets travelling with owners not stray animals.
- Catherine will circulate the German document to the group.

