

Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare

Date: 25th September 2023

Venue: Backweston campus

Meeting Time: 14:00 – 16:00

Attendee's:

Seán O'Laoide (Chair), Eoin Ryan (DAFM), Catherine Lawler (DAFM), Alan Walsh (DAFM), Aiden Maguire (DAFM), Siobhan Mullan (UCD), Chris Conneely (Irish Blue Cross), Suzie Carley (Dogs Trust), Jim Stephens (IKC), Maureen Byrne (APDT). Conor Dowling (ISPCA), Hana Scanlan (DAFM), Alan Rossiter (Veterinary Ireland), Rory Breathnach (UCD).

Online: Pat Watt (DSPCA), Claire Meade (The Cat Hospital).

Apologies: Sean Murray (DAFM), Paul Lawless (IKC).

1. Minutes and Action points from previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

The action points of previous meeting were reviewed.

2. Responsible Dog Ownership campaign

Group agreed the first step should be to produce a leaflet, with social media campaign to follow. The planned collaborative DAFM/DRCD initiative on responsible dog ownership was discussed.

3. Brachycephalic Group update

Noted support for a collaborative approach of Animal Welfare organisations.

ACCAW requested that the Brachycephalic group (BG) produce a campaign poster. BG to examine existing material and tailor message to BG campaign. DSPCA have access to multi-channel European media campaign assets with Brachycephalic material, which could be used for a localised Irish campaign and will share with BG.

Work on BG open letter to media regarding Brachycephalic health issues is progressing well. BG suggested possibility of a data system similar to VetCompass to monitor companion animal trends; UCD advised the meeting that a similar programme is

currently under development in UCD. The group raised a query on timelines for progress and potential Brachycephalic legislative options for DAFM, however the DAFM legislative programme will not include legislation relating to Brachycephalics in the current round. BG endorse the Irish Kennel club proposals for health certification. It was agreed to monitor the Irish Kennel club Brachycephalic initiative. In relation to research, the BG has submitted an application for funding to the BVA Animal Welfare Foundation, UK.

Action: DSPCA to share media campaign assets.

Action: BG to produce draft campaign poster for next ACCAW.

4. Ear cropping legislation update

DAFM updated the meeting on S.I. No. 412 of 2023, implemented from 1st September 2023. Three charities are currently permitted to rehome cropped ear dogs, and other charities may also apply for approval to rehome these dogs.

5. Artificial Insemination – FECAVA proposal

The group was informed that FECAVA are set to adopt a proposal in relation to artificial insemination of canines, (AI), stating that, in its opinion, this procedure should only be performed by a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse, that there is no need for surgical AI of companion animals and no companion animal should be sedated to have AI performed.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine Report on Dogs, Oct 2022, recommended a ban on surgical AI in canines. This was also a recommendation of this year's report on the working group on control of dogs.

DAFM is currently looking at this issue.

ACCAW raised concerns about the training of veterinary nurses in AI.

UCD consider that surgical AI may be justified in some cases.

Action: ACCAW to reflect on proposal and consider potential recommendation from ACCAW to the Minister on the matter of surgical AI.

Action: This item to be retained on next ACCAW agenda.

6. Responsible Cat ownership

ACCAW looking to package information into a leaflet or series of leaflets. Currently exploring tender to produce leaflets, similar to the dog ownership campaign.

ACCAW member Claire Meade, is currently working on setting up the Irish branch of International Cat Care.

Action: Dogs Trust to share assets from International Cat Care's responsible cat ownership campaign.

7. TNR information

Caitlin King, DAFM intern and UCD student, carried out a TNR research project over the summer, and is currently finalising her report.

ACCAW noted that farmers are traditionally opposed to TNR of their cats. ACCAW suggest any TNR campaign should include a targeted TNR voucher system for farmers.

It was noted that, in Brussels, TNR programmes were not successful; mandatory microchipping and neutering proved to be more useful.

Group noted recent Cats Protection scientific research paper which recommended that, instead of spending money on TNR of unowned cats, this money should be targeted at owned cats in order to reduce the population of unowned cats, to control over-population.

8. Electrical shock collars for dogs

Dogs Trust paper on Electric Shock Collars was discussed and well received.

Group discussed the English and Welsh approaches on this subject and if such approaches might feed into an ACCAW ministerial recommendation.

It was noted that electric collars used to keep a dog within garden perimeter work well with some dogs, but not all dogs respond effectively.

Action: ACCAW to consider the issue of potentially banning these devices and the question of alternatives to electric shock collars.

Action: Keep item on agenda to discuss further, with a view to potential ministerial recommendation(s).

9. Proposal for a joint survey by ACCAW/FAWAC on animal welfare

ACCAW member, Siobhan Mullan, circulated paper on a joint survey proposal to the ACCAW group on the topic of the place of animals in society, to include farmed animals and companion animals.

ACCAW agreed to consider the proposal in principle but would need to see survey questions in advance. Concerns were raised that other stakeholders in this space may have reservations in relation to such a survey.

10. Website Update

Background work on ACCAW website is progressing, listed by ICT team for development.

11. AOB

Next Meeting: 4th December, 14:00.

The issue of XL Bullies potentially coming into Ireland as a result of reduced prices for these breeds in UK due to new control measures in England was raised.