

BEVA/FVE TRANSPORT FORUM

The BEVA / FVE equine transport forum was held, thanks to the kind support of the European Commission, at the EESC buildings in Brussels on November 30th. Delegates attended from Australia, Albania, America, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the Ukraine.



The forum, sponsored by the BEVA Trust and World Horse Welfare, was initiated by BEVA President Madeleine Campbell in conjunction with the FVE, with the aim of understanding why enforcement of the current regulations governing the long-distance transport of horses across Europe isn't working, and what can be done to address that. "There has been a lot of discussion about changing and improving Regulation 1/2005" said Dr Campbell in her welcoming comments, "but the reality is that unless the rules are enforced having new rules will make no difference, and equally just properly enforcing the existing rules would have an immediate positive impact on equine welfare". This sentiment was echoed by Dr Andrea Gavinelli, Head of the Animal Welfare Unit at the European Commission. "A lot is about culture and attitude" he said, "and whatever the review (of 1/2005) says next year, improvements in enforcement need to start now".



Dr Andrea Gavinelli, Head of the Animal Welfare Unit at the European Commission, and Mr Alf Fussel, DG Sanco

The forum covered both horses being transported long distances for slaughter, and those being transported long distances for competition and breeding purposes, and this attracted a diverse range of delegates from throughout Europe. Particularly encouraging in terms of the slaughter horse trade was the active participation of representatives from Eastern European countries (where slaughter horses often start their journeys) and from Italy (which is the end destination for most slaughter horses). Mrs Anna-Maria Darmanin, welcoming delegates on behalf of the European Economic and Social Council (EESC), stated that the EESC was fully committed to the objectives of the forum and urged participants to take advantage of the opportunities for discussion and collaboration presented by the forum to problem-solve and make a practical difference. Her call was answered by the delegates and speakers, all of whom participated with a great deal of enthusiasm and goodwill during the day, and particularly in the afternoon panel sessions.

Amongst policy-makers, regulators and vets in the field alike, there was an evident desire to improve conditions for horses travelling long-distances to slaughter. Jo White of World Horse Welfare (WHW) gave a presentation of the depressingly familiar but still shocking welfare issues associated with the slaughter horse trade. Lack of access to water during the journey was highlighted by Ms White and other speakers as a prime concern. Fabio Gaudenzi, representing the European Livestock and Meat Trading Union (UECBV), quite rightly made the point that it was unfair to tarnish all transporters with the same brush as those responsible for the injuries and suffering illustrated in some of the “Views from the ground”. This point was accepted by participants and speakers alike. There had been substantial improvements by some transporters, agreed Mr Walter Winding, Chair and President of the FVE “but not nearly enough so far”. The challenge, suggested Mr Padraig Kenney, Chair of the FVE’s working group on transport, was to ensure that the reputable transporters were supported and those who did not comply with the legislation were put out of business: “The regulations ought to be protecting the good transporters and getting rid of the bad ones” Mr Kenney argued. Several delegates felt that a key to achieving this aim was the slaughterhouses refusing to accept animals which arrive in bad condition – both Mr Kenney and Dr Des Leadon, an acknowledged expert on horse transportation

and BEVA past-President, who attended the conference as a representative of the European Federation of Thoroughbred Breeders Associations (EFTBA), felt that this step, combined with an increased willingness of veterinarians to exercise their right to euthanase horses which were injured or diseased *en route* would quickly put transporters who failed to safeguard the welfare of the horses out of business. Terence Cassidy, of the Food and Veterinary Office at the European Commission, also used his presentation to highlight the importance of the veterinary profession in enforcement. “Official veterinarians (in one study)” he reported “were detecting problems but were not preventing transport from subsequently taking place”. Dr Loni, an Italian equine and State Vet working in the Health Ministry, felt that “When the horse is in Italy it is too late: there needs to be better control at the beginning of and during the journey”. Several delegates, including Dr Mario Sapino who gave an amusing but nonetheless alarming presentation illustrating the various ways in which transporters overcame the regulations pertaining to numbers and space allowances, felt that improved communication between veterinarians and competent authorities at the point of departure and those at the end destination would significantly help enforcement by picking up discrepancies.

Inevitably, there was some division of opinion on whether the medium-term aim should be the abolition of long-distance transport to slaughter. Mrs Christa Blanke, giving the “view from the ground” on behalf of the charity Animal Angels, argued that long-distance transport ought to be banned because “There is no way to prevent the suffering of horses...because there are so many inherent problems” – she highlighted a lack of contingency plans if the driver becomes ill, and the way in which even the best and most legally-made journey plans can be disrupted by weather and traffic, with disastrous impact on welfare. Dr Leadon commented that a very fundamental policy mistake had been occurring for years, which was “that we have perpetuated the status of slaughter horses as the second class citizens of Europe”. This point was driven home by the presentation of Graeme Cooke, head Vet at the FEI, who illustrated the luxurious ways in which competition horses are transported internationally. Expressing sentiments which were shared by Madeleine Campbell on behalf of BEVA and Josh Slater on behalf of FEEVA, Mr Cook explained that: “The FEI is not opposed to the slaughter of horses (for human consumption), but believes that slaughter should be as close as possible to the place of origin, and that slaughter houses must remain open”. Lack of more local slaughterhouses is, however, not the reason that horses are being driven the whole way across Europe to slaughter, according to Dr Gavinelli and to Professor Willy Baltussen, Head of Section at LEI/Wageningen in the Netherlands, who is currently undertaking a review assessing the impact of regulation 1/2005 (www.ibf.be/animaltransport). The reason that horses are still being transported such long distances to slaughter is that many consumers of horse meat, and Italian consumers in particular, want locally sourced meat, and if the horse is killed in Italy the meat gets labelled as being Italian. The issue is to a large extent a labelling one, supplemented by factors such as local preferences for the way in which meat is cut and a preference for fresh rather than chilled meat (a point which came out of the afternoon panel session chaired by Colm Gaynor, former Director of the European Commission’s Food and Veterinary Office and Chief Veterinary Officer for Ireland). Mr Mark Kennedy, speaking from the floor, commented that “In terms of shared responsibility the consumer is very important”, and this view was echoed by Dr Gavinelli, who explained the legislative reasons why any clear labelling of horse

meat being sold in Italy to indicate its true province and the distance which it had travelled to slaughter would have to be a voluntary system.



Dr Walter Winding, President of FVE, and Dr Madeleine Campbell, President of BEVA

The impact of economic factors upon enforcement was a recurring theme. Josh Slater argued that the simple reason why long-distance transport of horses to slaughter is still occurring is that it is more profitable to raise horses in Eastern European Countries, move them to Italy and slaughter them there than it would be to raise and slaughter them in Italy. Professor Baltussen gave a very compelling example of the increase in profit which could be made by transporters including just a few extra horses on each lorry. “High profits can be realised by *not* complying” he stated.

Those involved in the slaughter horse sector and the competition horse sector alike were concerned about the risks of transmission of infectious disease associated with non-compliant shipments and unreliable identification of horses. The threats to individual animals, to other groups of animals (including non-slaughter horses, by direct and indirect contact) and to humans were discussed. Jo White of WHW presented data on the number of slaughter horses starting the journey with disease or developing it along the way. In a detailed presentation looking at physiological stress responses and the effect of transport on immunosuppression, Dr Gianluigi Giovagnoli, DVM and specialist in Sanità Animale at the Allevamento e Produzioni Zootecniche, demonstrated how transport stress and the emergence of latent infectious disease depend not only upon the length of journey but also upon space allowances, social environment and things as simple as the position in which the head is tied. There followed considerable discussion about methods which could be currently employed for assessing health status *en route* (Dr Giovagnoli believed that the emergence of fever during transport was an important indicator) and about the possibility of developing lorry-side assays for various hormones as a method of measuring pre-clinical stress in future.

In the afternoon, the delegates divided into two groups, one of which discussed the problems relating to competition horse transport and the other problems of slaughter horse transport. Key points arising from those two sessions were as follows:

Competition horse session:

- All shipments (for whatever purpose) must comply with article 3 of Regulation 1/2005 in terms of not causing suffering not harm
- The definition of “Economic activity” in the current regulations is causing problems, particularly for equine charities needing to move animals. The delegates call upon the European Commission to re-define “Economic” in the legislation, or failing that to issue Community guidelines on the interpretation.
- Whilst delegates accepted that legally the definition of a “Registered Horse” is clear, they were unanimous that in practice “registered “ is being confused with “identified”, and that this is presenting a significant threat to equine welfare and biosecurity, and undermining the tripartite agreement. To address these problems, delegates propose that:
 - All registered horses of all ages must be microchipped, with an unique equine life number
 - All European control posts must be equipped with microchip scanners and horses must be scanned as they pass through them
 - All EU abattoirs must scan horses to identify them by their microchip at the time of slaughter
 - A central European database which can communicate with all national databases must be established so that horses can be accurately traced and identified via their microchips. Ideally, this centralised database would be run by the European Commission, but an alternative would be to have a charity run it, as is done for dogs.

Slaughterhorse session

- Commitment of finance and resources by Commission and Competent authorities to establish and operate effective framework and control system as per regulation 1 2005 consistently across all member states, including effective proportionate and dissuasive sanction systems.
- Best practice and procedures at critical control points, especially places of origin and destination, and control posts.
- Collaboration between and with in member states, including communication of information, cooperation on action and follow up where appropriate and necessary, education and training.
- Commitment of official veterinarian to implement regulations and act in best interests of animals welfare is essential. Training and involving police was suggested.

Perhaps the presentation which most comprehensively illustrated the importance of enforcement and the impact which individuals can have in terms of enforcing transport regulations was that given by Dr Alexander Rabitsch, a veterinary transport inspector from Austria. Dr Rabitsch showed how, by simply undertaking regular controls in co-operation with the Austrian police, he had dramatically reduced the number of non-compliant shipments coming through his region. The impact which proper enforcement can have was, ironically, demonstrated by the overwhelming reduction in the number of vehicles travelling via Dr Rabitsch's check point. "Enforcement (currently) causes route deviations" he showed by means of a map, frequently adding 2 hours to a journey to the slaughterhouse, which was clearly undesirable. The only solution to this, Dr Rabitsch argued, "Is *unified* enforcement", and he appealed to member states to prosecute regulation infringements and for the FVO to prosecute member states who repeatedly fail to enforce the legislation. Non-unified enforcement does, after all, confer an advantage on non-compliant transporters which absolutely goes against the European ideal of free and fair trade.



Dr Alexander Rabitsch

Like other speakers, Dr Rabitsch felt that Veterinary Inspectors had to act responsibly, whatever the pressures being brought to bear upon them, and to issue fines and to stop lorries from continuing where necessary. The need for the veterinary profession to take a lead role in educating all of those concerned with horse transport as well as in controlling consignments was one of the key conclusions of the day. This was seen as an important step in changing cultural attitudes and in developing within the horse transport industry a desire to follow best practice which, as one delegate put it, would cause a sea-change in attitudes akin to the change in attitudes about drink driving and wearing a seat belt in the last 10 years. Failing to comply with best practice when transporting equids needs to become socially unacceptable, and delegates and speakers undertook to work together in future to try and effect that change via a process of education, responsibility-sharing with consumers, policy makers and regulators, and industry-led enforcement. A Polish delegate pointed out that education of private horse owning clients about transport was also important, and this theme was developed upon in the afternoon panel sessions by Nicholas de Brauwere of Redwings

Horse Sanctuary. Graeme Cooke of the FEI stated that the FEI had excellent communication and education networks and will be happy to help with stakeholder engagement.

The day concluded with the announcement of the BEVA Trust Equine Transport Enforcement Award. This award has been instigated with the express intention of ensuring that the BEVA/FVE Transport Forum serves not as an end in itself, but as the starting point for practical changes to enforcement in the field which will improve equine welfare across Europe. The generously funded award (€1000) will be given annually to the individual or group of individuals working in the field who does the most to improve the enforcement of equine transport regulations. Nominations are open and can be made via the FVE and the BEVA Trust. The award will be judged by the FVE working group on transport, and will be awarded for the first time in November 2011.

The programme, abstracts and presentations from the conference can be found at:
<http://www.fve.org/events/index.html#conferences>