



FVE POSITION PAPER

THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS DURING TRANSPORTATION

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1. Background

1.1 This paper deals primarily with the transportation of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats by road, since this covers most of the areas of greatest concern both to veterinarians and to the public; but the long distance transportation of horses to slaughter is also an area of major concern. The transportation of poultry, though it may be the cause of welfare problems, is not specifically covered here.

1.2 Whenever a farmer moves animals from one place to another, some degree of stress is imposed on those animals. Even the simple act of herding animals from one pasture to another on the same farm is often achieved by applying aversive stimuli to the animals – the presence of people, perhaps gesticulating or shouting, the use of sticks or goads, or the use of dogs. The transportation of animals by road usually involves, in addition, disrupting the social grouping of animals, herding them into confined spaces and then making the surface on which they are standing unstable by moving it. Depending on the external climatic conditions, the length of the journey and the design of the vehicle, the animals may also be subjected to ambient temperature and relative humidity which are outside their comfort zone, and deprived of water and food for considerable periods. And at the end of the journey, they will be unloaded into an unfamiliar environment and may need to adapt to yet another social group.

1.3 Although we can demonstrate that the transportation of animals causes them stress - and we can observe confirmatory changes in both behavioural and physiological parameters when animals are stressed by transportation - those parameters neither allow us to quantify the stress experienced by individual animals, nor to compare it reliably with the stress caused by other circumstances. It is difficult to predict or quantify the stress which would be experienced by specific animals in a particular transport situation because of their individual predispositions and the multifactorial nature of the stressors.

1.4 Even if we had comprehensive, generally agreed and objective data which would enable us to predict the levels of stress experienced by all species and classes of livestock during all journey times, at various stocking densities and in all types of vehicles, it would not immediately allow us to draft legislation based on the science. Because we have no baselines or target values for comparison, it would merely lead to debate about what level of stress was acceptable during a particular journey. So it would not directly help us to define journey times, space allowances, rest periods, etc. for all classes of animals; it would merely move the arguments to a different area. To safeguard the welfare of animals during transportation, we therefore need to use a different approach; this paper proposes that we should combine the scientific data we have available with a pragmatic and rational assessment based on the experience of veterinarians working in the field.

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2. The role of the veterinary profession.

2.1 Veterinarians have a professional duty to protect the welfare of animals on farm, during transport and at slaughter. Moreover, the European public increasingly demands effective legislation to protect the welfare of animals and expects veterinarians, acting as the agent of the public, to initiate and implement appropriate legislation. The aspect of farm animal welfare which is most visible to the public is transportation and it is therefore particularly important that FVE, as the umbrella organisation representing the veterinary profession in Europe, has an agreed policy position on the welfare of animals during transportation.

2.2 The European veterinary profession recognises that it carries primary responsibility for regulating the health and welfare of animals during transportation. But to be able to act for the animals, the profession needs the tools to do the job - in whichever Member State (MS) problems occur. At present, veterinarians do not always have these tools. In a number of MSs the profession does not have the support of a clear commitment to animal welfare by the Competent Authority (CA), or does not have adequate legal powers, or is not given the authority to use the powers that do exist, or has insufficient staff to carry out adequate monitoring. Vets (usually, in this case, Official Veterinarians) in MSs cannot act unless their national governments support them with resources and authority, backed up by legal powers. In the absence of that support, there is a risk that the veterinary profession will be blamed for failing to protect the welfare of animals during transportation.

2.3 Since FVE recognises that veterinarians cannot at present reliably protect the welfare of animals during transportation, it also has a duty to make its concerns public and to suggest ways by which the situation may be improved.

3. The present situation.

3.1 The transportation of animals by road is integral to livestock farming in the EU because the breeding, rearing, fattening and slaughter of animals can rarely be carried out on the same premises. Large numbers of animals are transported within and between MSs every day and the majority suffer little distress during that process. But some long distance journeys do lead to severe animal welfare problems, particularly if the transported animals are individually of low value, as this increases the likelihood that transport conditions will be of a poor standard.

3.2 The major piece of current EU legislation relevant to animal transportation is Regulation (EC) No: 1/2005; but it was the end result of several years of work, reports and negotiation by a number of different bodies. An EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW), chaired by Prof. Donald Broom, produced a report in 2002 on the welfare of animals during transportation and, following a web consultation, this became the basis for a Commission proposal of 2003. Neither the European Parliament nor the Council were satisfied by the proposal and what became the Regulation and passed into EU law was extensively modified from the original Proposal. Some detailed provisions of the Regulation were - and still are - incomplete (e.g. space allowances for pigs transported by road and rail; technical specifications for satellite tracking of vehicles).

3.3 Although FVE accepts that Regulation (EC) 1/2005, if properly applied and rigorously enforced, could prevent many incidents of adverse welfare during transportation, the professional experience of veterinarians working in this field suggests that animal welfare during transportation may actually have deteriorated over recent years and reports from NGOs suggest that the Regulation itself is often not respected by those responsible for the transportation of animals, and not adequately enforced by officials of MSs. Moreover - perhaps because of EU enlargement - long distance transport of animals appears to be more frequent and more welfare problems are being found. It is well recognised that the risk of

adverse welfare increases with increasing journey time and FVE has seen considerable numbers of published reports, from FVO and other organisations, which confirm these findings.

3.4 The first annual reports from MSs on the implementation of EC 1/2005 were due in June 2008. If published, they may provide factual information on the application of the Regulation; but the usefulness of the data will depend on the level of monitoring carried out in individual MSs. The collection of clear and transparent surveillance data on the welfare of animals during transportation, including monitoring results and outcomes, is essential both for animal welfare and animal health reasons.

3.5 At a Working Group meeting convened by the EU Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO) in February 2008, officials made clear that they intended to seek amendment of Regulation (EC) 1/2005 in respect of traveling times and space allowances only, and that they wished to revert to the parameters included in the Commission Proposal of 2003 – which were not accepted by the European Parliament or the Council at the time.

3.6 But FVE's view is that the current Regulation is already too complicated and that this inhibits its effective monitoring and enforcement. In many MSs, too few officials are at present trained and deployed for implementation to be effective and it is not likely, given other priorities, that more will be deployed. Against this background, little purpose will be served by making any amendments/additions to the existing Regulation which further complicate the situation. Instead, it is imperative that legislation to protect the welfare of animals during transportation is made as simple as possible, so that it is fully understood both by those responsible for the transportation of animals and by those responsible for monitoring and enforcing it. Enforcement of current legislation is handicapped by - e.g. - lack of clarity over journey times, incompatibility with drivers' hours, confusion regarding the transportation of "registered" horses and provision for the feeding of unweaned animals on a vehicle. The aim should therefore be for consistent implementation and enforcement of basic rules.

3.7 As an example of unnecessary complication, the existing Regulation makes a distinction between "registered" and "non-registered" equidae. FVE can see no justification for treating the welfare of different categories of equidae differently; the provision merely causes confusion and uncertainty both for transporters and for those charged with enforcing the Regulation, especially in the light of Regulation EC 504/2008 regarding the permanent identification of all horses.

4. FVE position.

4.1 The vast majority of animal movements take place without significant or unacceptable distress being caused to the animals. But FVE believes that the transportation of animals should be subject to the "3R" principle – it should be refined, reduced and replaced wherever possible. Animals should be reared as close as possible to the premises on which they are born and slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production.

4.2 From an animal welfare aspect, FVE is content that the local movement of livestock over short distances (often by their owners) should be lightly regulated, both to facilitate the normal conduct of livestock farming and to enable officials to concentrate their efforts where problems are most likely. The major problems occur when animals are transported for long periods and over long distances, especially in unsuitable vehicles.

4.3 When animals are transported, EU legislation is needed to ensure that common conditions apply across all MSs. This should set limits to the time and distance they can travel during a

single journey and standardise, define and regulate the conditions under which they travel. To promote good animal welfare during the journey, all personnel involved in the commercial transportation of animals should be appropriately and effectively trained, transporters should be authorised by the CA and vehicles should be suitable for the purpose and registered with the CA. Training requirements for personnel, vehicle standards, pre-movement checks for fitness to travel, minimum space allowances, provisions for environmental monitoring, journey times, and rest periods after transportation should all be defined in the legislation.

4.4 To ensure that the legislation is effective:

- It must be simple, practical and unambiguous;
- Consignments must be accompanied by certification which allows officials of the CA in any MS to monitor, control and enforce the legislation;
- MSs must provide their veterinarians with the legal powers, authority, resources and training to properly administer the Regulation;
- enforcement by MSs must be rigorous and targeted particularly at the beginning and end of journeys, in addition to spot checks during transportation;
- penalties for infringements should be high enough to discourage further offending but should distinguish between technical breaches of the Regulation and instances where serious welfare problems are found;
- there must be provision, in individual cases, for feedback from the CA responsible for the destination to the CA responsible for the premises of origin, so that problems can be addressed.

4.5 As explained above (paragraph 1.4), FVE believes that scientific principles, although fundamental, cannot be used as the only basis for appropriate legislation to protect the welfare of animals during transportation. And because maximising the profit from the animals is the primary reason for subjecting them to long journeys, the most effective way to reduce the number and length of journeys will be to make it more expensive to transport animals for long periods and/or over long distances, and to ensure that maximum journey times are rigorously enforced. The FVE therefore proposes that maximum journey times should be reduced, so that animals do not need to be fed or rested on the vehicle during a journey. While this proposal will undoubtedly promote the welfare of animals during transportation, it is not intended that maximum journey times should be scientifically defensible *per se*; the intention is to put economic pressure on transporters to refine, reduce and/or replace unnecessary transportation of live animals; e.g. to replace it with the transport of carcasses or germ cells wherever possible.

4.6 After the period of transportation, which should be calculated from the loading of the first animal until the unloading of the last animal, they should be unloaded from the vehicle into suitable accommodation for a time sufficient for their full recovery from the stress of the journey, before they may commence another journey – accompanied by new health and welfare certification. But, to be enforceable, travel times for animals must be compatible with EU regulations for drivers' hours.

4.7 FVE believes that minimum space allowances for all classes of livestock should be set out in the revised Regulation; minimum heights for compartments must also be specified, so that animals can stand naturally and have good ventilation. Determining these stocking densities should be easier, as it will no longer be necessary to provide for rest periods to be taken on the vehicle, nor for animals to be fed and watered on the vehicle during the journey. It should be recognised that maximum group size (i.e. the size of pens and the presence of well-designed and properly positioned partitions) is at least as important as space allowances.

4.8 While FVE insists that maximum journey times must be rigorously enforced, it proposes that a clause should be included in the legislation to the effect that it shall be a defence to a

charge of exceeding the maximum journey time if a transporter can show that an unforeseen - and unforeseeable - delay had occurred during the journey, but that it was in the best interests of the welfare of the animals for the journey to be completed, rather than subjecting them to the extra stress of unloading, resting and undergoing a second, short journey.

4.9 Unfit animals must not be allowed to start a journey and FVE reiterates its position that “downer” animals (i.e. recumbent animals unable to stand unaided) should never be transported, but dealt with as casualties on their home premises.

4.10 FVE considers that the proposed Satellite Tracking System could be a useful additional tool in enforcement, but it is not a complete solution. To be effective, technical specifications must be adopted and the system needs to be linked to TRACES. It must also be decided where to store the data and who will have access to it; but it is essential that Official Veterinarians have real time access to data held in their own MS and in others.

5. Summary

5.1 FVE does not believe that the introduction of Regulation (EC) 1/2005 has significantly improved the welfare of animals during transportation; in large part, because of failure to achieve adequate implementation and enforcement in all MSs. In particular, it has failed to address effectively the problems associated with the long distance transportation to slaughter of relatively low value animals.

5.2 FVE considers that the proposal by the Commission only to seek amendments to the provisions of the Regulation regarding travelling times and space allowances is impractical and, if achieved, would have little impact on the present unsatisfactory situation. Moreover, it considers that the timescale set by the Commission for consideration of amendments is too short.

5.3 FVE advises that amendment or replacement of the Regulation should be targeted on simplification of its provisions and on reducing the number of long distance journeys.

5.4 FVE urges the Commission to make strenuous efforts to encourage MSs to implement and enforce both the existing (even though unsatisfactory) provisions of the current Regulation and any new provisions agreed.

5.5 In this paper, FVE makes proposals which, it believes, could lead to the introduction of simpler legislation which could be more effectively enforced using existing resources.

5.5 As always, FVE stands ready to assist the Commission in any way it can to protect the health and welfare of animals on the farm, in transit and at slaughter.