

Executive Summary

Removing the Blinkers:

The Health and Welfare of European Equidae in 2015



WorldHorseWelfare

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A World Horse Welfare and Eurogroup for Animals report

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This report aims to give a snapshot of equidae and the equine sector in the EU in 2015, uncover welfare problems, analyse the legislation currently in place affecting them, and recommend how legislation can better protect these animals.

Equidae in 21st century Europe play a myriad of roles – they are perhaps the most versatile animals humans have domesticated. While this diversity of use has ensured that equidae have remained close to humans, it has also created problems when seeking protection for them in law. Equidae do not fit neatly into the categories used in modern legislation and policy, meaning that they can easily fall into gaps between laws drafted for pets and those aimed at farm animals, often to the detriment of their welfare.

Versatility and variety

Based on averaging the available figures, the European Union (EU) has around seven million equidae, used for a wide variety of purposes – although it should be noted that this figure probably underestimates the true equine population. The equine sector:

- Provides employment to at least 896,000 people across the EU.
- Is worth over €100 billion per annum.
- Uses at least 2.6 million hectares of land in the EU.

The scale and breadth of the sector, coupled with its fragmented organisational structure, mean that the information available is often skewed towards more centrally organised aspects or pursuits, such as high-level sports and racing.

Equidae are also essential working animals in some areas of the EU, with many more kept as pets or leisure animals. These animals may never be registered with a centralised organisation, and will therefore not be included in official figures from stakeholder bodies. Legislators must be aware of the existence of these animals and their owners, and ensure that policies take their needs into account. Indeed, further research may well be needed if policy making is to be sufficiently holistic to cater for equidae.

Challenges in legislation

Depending on where they are and how they are used, equidae may be classified as farm animals or pet animals in legislation. In EU legislation there are at least three different official definitions of ‘equidae’, three sub-categories of equid, and several context-specific definitions which depend on how the animal is being used. Equidae may also be wild animals.

Across the 28 Member States, there are considerable differences in some aspects of legislation. Most have some form of animal welfare legislation, but the provisions of this legislation vary greatly with a number of fundamental differences, such as the legal grounds for euthanasia.

EU legislation is often enforced differently across the EU. Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations is a particular cause for concern – not only do the provisions of the Regulation fail to follow up-to-date scientific evidence about the effects of long-distance transport on equidae, but levels of enforcement are highly variable across the EU. In addition, this regulation pertains mostly to transportation for commercial purposes. Commission Regulation (EC) No 504/2008 (the equine identification Regulation) was highlighted as another area for concern by the 2013 horse meat scandal – progress is now being made, with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/262 (laying down rules pursuant to Council Directives 90/427/EEC and 2009/156/EC as regards the methods for the identification of Equidae (Equine Passport Regulation)) having been agreed upon by Member States and the Commission - but with some Member States reporting more than 70 Passport Issuing Organisations operating within their borders, it is hardly surprising that at the moment the system is fragmented and confusing. This is indicated by the variety of estimates that are provided for the equine population of the EU. A properly functioning identification system would remove this uncertainty.

Continuing welfare problems

Unfortunately, equidae continue to suffer welfare problems across the EU. While some Member States face unique challenges, a number of themes have become clear. The most commonly perceived problems, as reported by respondents to a survey of European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are:

- Problems with the environments and ways in which equidae are kept, including:
 - environments with a lack of space;
 - long periods of confinement without access to turnout, and environments which do not provide social interaction;
 - a lack of knowledge of proper equine care among equid owners, and;
 - neglect (failing to meet basic needs such as the need for food or water).
- Training and handling methods, including welfare problems in sport.
- The use of equidae for meat.
- The treatment of working equidae.
- A lack of access to professionals such as veterinarians, farriers to provide hoof-care and saddlers to provide well-fitting harnesses.

With this in mind, we have made a number of specific recommendations to the European Commission, Competent Authorities, the Food and Veterinary Office and equine sector bodies. These should ensure that:

- Equine welfare and health is protected at EU level through adequate and enforceable legislation and through effective implementation and enforcement of such legislation.
- The threat posed to the sector by disease is recognised and addressed.
- A greater awareness of the versatility of equidae is provided for both in policy development and legislation.
- A consistent approach is taken to how equidae are defined and treated within EU law.

Recommendations

The European Commission:

- Should commission a Eurostat study to analyse the economic and social impact of all aspects of the equine sector.
- Should make TRACES data available to the public with far less delay than is currently the case.
- Should adopt a single definition clarifying which species are counted as equidae for the purposes of all relevant legislation.
- Should amend the applicability of the derogation for registered equidae for the purposes of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 to include proof of the purposes of the journey when this exceeds 8 hours.
- Should allow Competent Authorities to radically streamline the number of Passport Issuing Organisations operating within their Member States.
- Should table proposals to replace Council Directive 98/58/EC with species-specific equine welfare legislation, allowing for greater levels of harmonisation between Member States and creating a level playing field to assist with the operation of the single market.
- Should make independently monitored CCTV in slaughterhouses dealing with equidae mandatory.
- Should extend the labelling rules set out by Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers of equine meat.
- Should actively support the development of guides to good practice to assist with levels of compliance and consistent enforcement, for example by releasing resources for translation of such documents and assisting with their distribution.
- Should support the production and dissemination of information on how to meet the needs of equidae, and should consider the expansion of their educational resources on farm animal welfare to encompass equine welfare.
- Should ensure that animal health, welfare and traceability are included in any trade negotiations and should only authorise the import of horse meat from Third Countries with EU-compatible animal welfare, health and food safety standards.
- Should bring infringement proceedings in cases where breaches of animal welfare and health legislation are discovered and not swiftly rectified by Competent Authorities.
- Should ensure that Third Country standards on the administration of medicinal products which may harm human health are harmonised with EU standards where animal products are to be imported.

The Food and Veterinary Office:

- Should regularly conduct unannounced inspections at EU certified slaughterhouses and cutting plants in Third Countries, and include inspecting other parts of the production chain during these missions.

The European Commission and Competent Authorities:

- Must take urgent action to address the shortcomings in the registration and traceability of equidae.
- Must allow for the differing perceptions of equidae in different Member States in their communication plans for Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/262.
- Should consider working equidae in agricultural and tourism policy. Support should be given to welfare-focussed development of equine tourism and agriculture, and robust enforcement should be carried out in cases where welfare is not respected.
- Should promote information to assist tourists to make welfare-friendly choices when deciding whether or not to use the services of working equidae.
- Must ensure that they are aware of emerging sectors in the equine market, whether legislation may be needed to ensure good animal welfare and consumer safety, and how legislation may affect them.

Competent Authorities:

- Must be clear about when an equid is classed as 'semi-feral' (meaning that it is owned), and when it has no natural person to act as an owner. Legislation must make it clear how each of these types of equid differ, and who is responsible for their welfare and health.
- Should investigate reports of inhumane practices during euthanasia, such as the improper use of drugs such as T-61 without appropriate sedation, as a matter of urgency when such concerns are reported to them.
- Should always ensure that they consider the specific needs of equidae when drafting animal welfare policy, rather than assuming that they will always be covered by broad regulation pertaining either to livestock or pet animals.
- Should ensure that those slaughterhouses licenced to take equidae are able to meet the welfare needs of these animals, in their facilities and the training of their personnel.
- Should - while recognising the value of self-regulation schemes - regard these as enhancements to welfare legislation, rather than replacements.
- Should ensure that they allow enough flexibility in the penalties they set during the implementation of Community Regulations to allow dissuasive penalties to be set, no matter where in the EU the sanctioned business is based.

Equine sector bodies:

- Should encourage equid owners to make provision to prevent welfare problems from developing at the end of the life or working career of an equid, as part of the promotion of responsible ownership.
- Should give equine welfare in sports and leisure a priority equal to that of the safety of the rider and higher than other considerations.