
LEWES TOWN COUNCIL

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE STATEMENT

Lewes Town Council's Farm Animal Welfare policy was adopted (*resolution FC2003/60*) at its meeting on 29th January 2004. This statement covers the following areas:

It sets out certain broad principles together with its belief on the need for action in certain key areas (for example, an end to the battery cage, veal crates, pigs kept in "concentration camps"). This document defines its view on these key areas, acknowledging that the Council is not in a position itself to take action.

The authority believes that the live export trade, in particular for slaughter, should come to an end, and hopes that its views will be influential in advancing the debate locally and in influencing the thinking of central government.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND KEY AREAS

Intensive animal husbandry

The Council wishes to make clear its opposition to intensive animal husbandry. In saying this we are referring to farming methods which:

- Lead to serious health problems and physical pain for the animals involved and/or
- Completely frustrate their natural behaviour. Systems which, for example, make it impossible for hens to nest-build or pigs to root are condemned as unacceptable.

Millions of animals are forced to spend the whole of their lives indoors, kept in barren, overcrowded sheds or cages. Such animals never experience fresh air or daylight until the day they are taken off to the slaughterhouse.

Two examples of such systems are:

- A major scientific study has shown that in natural conditions pigs spend 75% of their daylight hours in activities such as rooting, foraging for food and exploring. None of these activities are possible for the vast majority of the 13 million pigs that are slaughtered each year for their meat. Most of these pigs are kept closely packed together in gloomy, indoor units; usually they are given no straw and have to stand or lie on bare concrete or slatted floors.
- The battery cage commonly-used for egg-laying hens is a particularly cruel system and the Council believes that this system should be ended. The cage is so tiny that hens cannot even spread their wings, let alone run or walk. The lack of exercise results in bone weakness and a high incidence of broken bones. One of the hen's strongest instincts is to build a nest so that she can lay her eggs in privacy and comfort. Nest-building is, of course, impossible in the battery cage, however they will often pull out their own feathers in an attempt to build a nest. "Barn" reared hens fare little better than battery fed hens, where birds are often trampled to death or resort to cannibalism.

Selective Breeding

The Council believes there is a need to reverse the selective breeding of animals for ever faster or larger



growth. Modern broiler chickens (broilers are the birds reared for their meat) have been worst affected by this process. They have been bred to grow so quickly that their legs cannot properly support their overdeveloped bodies. As a result, each year millions of chickens suffer from painful, sometimes crippling leg disorders. The heart and lungs are also unable to keep pace with the rapid body growth, with some 7 million broilers dying of heart disease each year before they attain their slaughter weight at just 6 weeks old.

Turkeys have been bred to develop huge, meaty breasts. The birds are so misshapen that they can no longer mate naturally - all breeding has to be done through artificial insemination. Moreover, the heavy upper body places great stress on the hips, resulting in many turkeys suffering from painful degenerative hip disorders.

Selective breeding together with rich diets has led to dairy cows producing an unnaturally high volume of milk. This and poor housing leads to many cows suffering from lameness which often results in long-term pain. Professor John Webster, Britain's leading dairy cattle expert, has written that "The UK dairy industry is living with a painful, crippling disease with a morbidity rate close to 100%". Calves are taken away from their mother a few days after birth, resulting in distress for the mother crying for her young. If her calf is male it may even be slaughtered for being the wrong sex.

Live Exports

We deal below with how local authorities can help enforce the laws on animal transport. However, we would state our opposition to the principle of export of live farm animals, in particular for slaughter. The majority of animals exported from this country are slaughtered on, or soon after, arrival at their destination. It makes no sense to subject animals to the stresses of long journeys (often with no food or water for up to 2 days) only to slaughter them at the journey's end. The Council believes that animals going for slaughter must be sent to a slaughterhouse as near as possible to the farm on which they have been reared; as in older traditional farming methods.

The majority of calves exported from Britain end up in narrow veal crates in Holland and France, a system so cruel that its use has been illegal in Britain since 1990. We believe that it is totally wrong for our calves to be exported for rearing abroad in a system which has been outlawed here in Britain.

We believe that the export of live animals from Britain should be brought to an end and replaced by meat exports. Indeed the EU as a whole should abandon long distance live transport and replace it with a carcass trade.

Law enforcement

Detailed laws already protect animals in many areas of concern. The real problem is one of regular enforcement.

Just as much can be done for animal welfare by vigorous enforcement of existing laws as by creating new ones. It is here that local authorities have such a vital role to play as they have a number of statutory powers and duties as regards enforcement. Lewes Town Council exhorts the District and County Council to stringently enforce existing laws.

Transport of live animals

Large numbers of farm animals are transported around the country, some of them on relatively short journeys (for example, from farm to market), others over long distances, such as animals being sent to one of the ports for export to the EU. This is often due to the lack of local slaughter houses, which in itself is to be deplored. Many animals are transported to other parts of the country or EU where they



are then slaughtered. However the place of slaughter is deemed to be the origin of the animal, for example some “Welsh” lamb originates from England or further a field.

The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 and the Transit of Animals (Road & Rail) Order 1975 contain detailed provisions, including ones stipulating that:

- Animals must be given food and water at specified intervals;
- Animals which are unfit to travel must not be transported;
- Animals must not be carried in overcrowded conditions; and
- Vehicles must conform to certain standards.

Local authorities have the principal responsibility for enforcing the animal transport regulations.

Transport can present problems for poultry as well as for larger animals. Around 1.5 million chickens die each year on their journey from the farm to the slaughterhouse. A huge number also suffer from broken bones and bruising during these journeys.

Poultry are protected during transport by The Welfare of Poultry (Transport) Order 1988 and The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994.

Local authorities must reduce the suffering of poultry during transport by vigorous enforcement of this legislation.

Markets

The Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990 is the central piece of legislation in this area.

Conditions at markets are often poor, with overcrowding and rough handling being commonplace. All too often animals do not have proper access to water; this can be a particularly serious problem in hot weather.

The 1990 Order contains a number of helpful provisions, which need to be enforced more stringently. The Order's principal provisions include:

- An animal must not be dragged along or lifted off the ground by its tail, legs, feet, fleece, wing, head, neck, ears or horns;
- Electric goads may only be used in limited circumstances;
- Animals must not be kept in overcrowded pens, cages or hutches;
- Unfit animals must not be exposed for sale; and
- Young lambs with unhealed navels must not be taken to market (this provision is to be found in The Welfare of Animals at Markets (Amendment) Order 1993).
- Young should not be separated from its mother until weaned, for example calves.

Responsible authorities must rigidly enforce these rules.