Welfare of transported animals: MEPs urge EU states to do a better job

• More unannounced and risk-based checks and tougher penalties for offenders
• Minimise transport time and transport carcasses rather than live animals
• Better enforcement of existing rules, with the help of new technology

The EU and its member states must enforce existing rules on protecting transported animals better and penalise all offenders, the Agriculture Committee said on Thursday.

In a resolution, adopted by 22 votes in favour to 12 against, with four abstentions, the Agriculture Committee reiterated Parliament’s 2012 call for a strong and harmonised enforcement of the 2005 EU law on the protection of animals during transport, which is currently poorly applied in some member states.

Tougher penalties for offenders

To this end, the EU Commission should not shy away from imposing sanctions on member states, which fail to apply the EU rules correctly, MEPs say. Member states for their part should prosecute breaches of EU rules with effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties, harmonised at EU level, reflecting the damage, scope, duration and recurrence of the infringement. These sanctions should include confiscation of vehicles and compulsory retraining of staff responsible for animal welfare.

Stricter checks and better transport vehicles

MEPs want to deploy modern technology to improve enforcement of current rules. They call on the Commission to develop geolocation systems that would enable animals’ location and the duration of journeys in vehicles to be tracked. They also demand a real-time feedback loop between points of departure and arrival and penalties for those who falsely fill in journey logs.

To protect animals better, national authorities should:

• carry out more unannounced and risk-based checks,
• inform authorities in all countries along the transport route if a breach is identified,
• push transporters to develop systems to prevent breaches recurring,
• suspend or withdraw transporter’s license for repeat offenders,
• ban non-compliant vehicles and vessels, and
• adapt ports to animal-welfare requirements and improve pre-loading checks.

MEPs also push for a new 2020-2024 animal welfare strategy and a clear definition of what constitutes fitness for transport and guidelines on how to assess it. They also want a science-based update of EU rules on transport vehicles to ensure:

• sufficient ventilation and temperature control,
• appropriate drinking systems and liquid feed,
• reduced stocking densities and specified sufficient minimum headroom, and
• vehicles adapted to the needs of each species.

Cutting transport time and dealing with exports

Animal journey times should be as short as possible, the Agriculture Committee argues. It promotes alternative strategies, such as local or mobile slaughter and meat processing facilities close to the place of rearing or on-farm slaughter, short distribution circuits and direct sales. MEPs ask the Commission to carry out research on appropriate journey times for different species and to develop a strategy to shift from live animal transport mainly to transport of meat-and-carcass and germinal products, when possible.

The adopted text also insists that unless transport standards in non-EU countries are aligned with the EU ones and properly enforced, the EU should seek to mitigate the differences through bilateral agreements or, if not possible, ban transport of live animals to these countries. MEPs also want EU states bordering non-EU countries to provide rest areas where animals could be unloaded and given food and water while waiting to leave the EU.

Quote

“Actors in the transport chain need to live up to their obligations, whether they are farmers, traders of animals, veterinarians, or transport companies. We have now made it clear to the Commission and the member states that they must do so, either by enforcing current rules properly or by looking into new policy tools to apply new technology and minimise transport times”, said rapporteur Jørn Dohrmann (ECR, DK).

Next steps

The text approved by the Agriculture Committee will now be scrutinised by the Parliament as a whole, most probably during the 11 - 14 February plenary session in Strasbourg.

Background

Every year, millions of animals are transported between member states, within member states and to non-EU countries over long distances for breeding, rearing, further fattening and slaughter but also for recreation, competitions and as companions.
Following media reports on ill-treatment of transported animals, the Parliament’s Conference of Presidents (EP president and political groups’ leaders) tasked the Agriculture Committee with drafting an implementation report on how EU rules are being enforced in practice.

Thursday, 24 January 2019

In the Chair: Czesław Adam Siekierski (EPP, PL)

Further information
Draft report, amendments and opinions of other EP committees (see point 5)
Procedure file
Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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