



Global Conference on Animal Welfare: an OIE initiative

TOPIC: Setting the Scene

TITLE: The OIE Animal Welfare Strategic Initiative – Progress, Priorities and Prognosis

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ABSTRACT:

In recognition of the increasing scientific, political and public attention being given to animal welfare, the topic was identified as an important emerging issue during the preparation of the 2001 – 2005 OIE third strategic plan. At the 69th session of the OIE International Committee in 2001, approval was given to the Director General's work programme to implement the recommendations of the strategic plan. In this programme, it was agreed to establish a new department specifically responsible for international trade in animals and animal products, which would provide extra resources to address new topics including food safety and animal welfare. It was agreed that initial scoping documents would be commissioned to assist in defining the degree and scope of OIE involvement with these new topics.

At the 70th General Session in 2002, specific recommendations concerning the scope, priorities, policies, functions and modus operandi for the OIE's involvement in animal welfare were presented. These recommendations were based on the work of an *ad hoc* international expert group. and were fully endorsed by all 164 member countries. In recognition of the need to approach this new area of activity in a disciplined manner, and the need to involve relevant stakeholders, the recommendations specifically included the following:

- That the OIE should develop a detailed vision and strategy to recognise the complex nature of animal welfare issues.
- That the OIE should then develop policies and guiding principles to provide a sound foundation from which to elaborate specific recommendations and standards.
- That the OIE should establish a working group on animal welfare to define and coordinate activities and the working group should advise on specific tasks to be carried out by *ad hoc* groups.
- That in consultation with the OIE, the working group should develop a detailed operational plan for the initial 12 months, addressing the priority issues identified, and lastly
- That the working group and its *ad hoc* groups should consult with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) having a broad international representation and make use of all available expertise and resources, including those from academia, the research community, industry and other relevant stakeholders.

A permanent animal welfare working group was established to define and coordinate OIE animal welfare activities and first met in October 2002. The working group drafted a mission statement plus policies and guiding principles, developed a work programme for 2003 and reviewed the scope, drafted terms of reference, and identified potential members for four separate ad hoc groups. These groups will address land transport, sea transport, humane slaughter (including religious slaughter) and population reduction for disease control purposes. Initial meetings of all four groups have taken place. These working group recommendations, plus a proposal to hold a global animal welfare conference were fully endorsed at the 71st General Session in 2003.

The OIE has made encouraging progress over a relatively short two year time period and the challenge is now to maintain this momentum and harness the support of all OIE member countries and stakeholders. A commitment to consultation with, and communication to, all interested parties will be critical to success.