



Global Conference on Animal Welfare: an OIE initiative

TOPIC: The way forward

TITLE: Application of legislation, scientific guidelines and standards

AUTHOR: Mellor, DJ, Animal Welfare Science and Bioethics Centre, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

ABSTRACT:

As attitudes to animal welfare have evolved over the last 50 years, they have presented a significant change management challenge. This applies to both improvements to existing systems and moving to more acceptable systems over a realistic time frame. The concepts of total quality management, continuous improvement and change management are all subjects of an extensive management literature and have direct relevance in the animal welfare arena.

The animal welfare challenge is characterised by a need to address cultural, religious, economic, political, ethical and scientific issues in the formation of robust and credible animal welfare policy and practice. There is also a need to adopt credible practical strategies for progressing animal welfare improvements. Committing to incremental improvement towards defined higher standards allows some immediate progress, the specific scheduling of further improvements in the future, sustained stakeholder involvement in the process and time for more complex issues to be analysed and resolved. It is accepted, however, that policies based on a philosophy of incremental, evolutionary change will not satisfy minority groups at either end of the animal welfare/animal rights spectrum of opinion.

The NZ experience of incremental animal welfare change management, over the last 25 years, is used to illustrate the importance of a number of critical factors and the different roles that can be played by legislation, scientific guidelines and codified standards.

These factors include:

- Role of animal welfare advocacy organisations
- Role of the veterinary profession
- Role of independent ministerial advisory committees
- Role of national consultative committees
- Importance of animal welfare science capability

- Initial use of voluntary codes
- Transition to legislated codes
- Pros and cons of public consultation
- Outcomes-based versus prescriptive legislation
- The importance of stakeholder involvement and “ownership”
- The role and potential of Quality Assurance schemes

The importance of a number of these factors will be illustrated by practical examples. The burgeoning impact of the market place as a means of raising standards and ensuring compliance, via consumer and retailer influence, will also be referred to.