

Responsible Ownership of Companion Animals – An OIE (and NZ) Perspective

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This presentation will highlight some of the key OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) activities relevant to the responsible ownership of companion animals and will specifically refer to the development of the OIE Guidelines for Stray Dog Control, which address both animal welfare and public health (rabies control) issues. Brief reference will also be made to the New Zealand situation regarding dog population management.

Since its establishment, in 1924, the OIE has made a major indirect contribution to animal welfare globally, via the organisation's involvement in epizootic disease control. The work of the organisation assumed a new prominence in the 1990s, through recognition of its role in providing standards, guidelines and recommendations for animal health and zoonoses through the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement of the WTO.

In recognition of the increasing scientific, political and public attention given to animal welfare in general, and its role in international trade in particular, animal welfare was identified as an important emerging issue during the preparation of the 2001 – 2005 OIE third strategic plan. At the 69th General Session of the OIE International Committee, 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 for addressing new topics including food safety, zoonoses 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 of the OIE, held in Paris during May 2002, the Director-General presented specific recommendations concerning the scope, priorities and *modus operandi* for the OIE's involvement in animal welfare and these were fully endorsed by the then 164 member countries. These recommendations were based on the work of an *ad hoc* group of international experts and included the following which are relevant to companion animals:

- The OIE should develop policies and guiding principles to provide a sound foundation from which to elaborate specific recommendations and standards.
- The OIE should establish a working group on animal welfare to co-ordinate and manage animal welfare activities and the working group should advise on specific tasks to be carried out by *ad hoc* groups.
- When addressing zoonoses, the OIE should give priority to addressing the animal welfare aspects of animal population reduction and control policies (including stray dogs and cats).
- The OIE should incorporate, within its communication strategy, key animal welfare stakeholders, including industry and NGOs.

This commitment to working closely with Governments, the science community, the veterinary profession and animal welfare NGOs, in communicating and consulting on the development of animal welfare standards, has been critical to the success and international credibility of the OIE's achievements to date.