

The Role of EFSA in the Assessment of Animal Health and Welfare Risks from Canine Overpopulation

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The main mission of EFSA is to provide scientific and technical advice for future legislation or policies in all areas with direct or indirect impact on food and feed safety, including animal health and welfare, plant health and nutrition. EFSA works in response to scientific advice requests from the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU Member States, and self-mandates. A scientific opinion (SO) contains the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the analysis of the scientific data currently available on the topic and the outcomes of the risk assessment. EFSA has oriented its tasks to contribute to the improvement of animal health in Europe in accordance with the “Animal Health Strategy 2007-2013” and the “Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals” (2006-2010), stating that the concept of animal health includes not only animal diseases, but also its critical relation to animal welfare and its relevance to public health. The establishment of high standards of animal health is an essential pillar in safeguarding public health and food security and for ensuring animal welfare. Diseases can reduce welfare, as stress can increase susceptibility to infections and lead to animal disease, or a wider dissemination of pathogens and pollutants in the food chain. Although extensive production systems can improve animal welfare, they may also increase exposure to certain diseases. Since 2004, EFSA’s AHAW Panel has adopted a total of 73 SOs (39 on animal health and 34 on animal welfare issues). When deemed necessary, possible interactions between animal health and animal welfare and the potential impact on food safety were considered with the participation of other scientific Units of EFSA (i.e. biological hazards, contaminants and plant health). In the animal welfare SOs the relevant aspects of animal health and food safety are always taken into account. When requested and deemed relevant, animal welfare aspects are considered in the animal health SOs.

Though the AHAW Panel of EFSA is responsible for adopting SOs, mainly focused on food-producing animals (including fish), it has also adopted several opinions on health risks of companion animals. The risk of introduction of the rabies virus into some EU Member States as a consequence of abandoning the serological tests measuring protective antibodies was assessed in 2006. The SO concluded that vaccination against rabies should remain the key requirement for pet movement between Member States. The risks of introduction of ticks or echinococcosis into an EU Member State as a consequence of abandoning national rules were assessed in two different SOs in 2007. In the case of ticks, there was a clear lack of sufficient evidence about the epidemiological situation to be able to refuse or accept the additional measures applied by these countries. In the case of the echinococcosis it was concluded that the probability of re-infection in the country of origin, and the probability of viable egg elimination in the importing country, are reduced to a negligible level when suitable treatment with praziquantel is given between 24 and 48 hours prior to departure.