



Animal Welfare Committee Work Plan 2023 to 2024

Updated: May 2024

This document sets out the Animal Welfare Committee Work Plan for 2023 to 2024. It outlines the projects which are ongoing from the 2022 to 2023 work plan and the new projects which will be undertaken during 2023 to 2024. Please note, the work plan may be subject to change.

Ongoing Projects: 2022-23

An exploration of alternatives to the culling of male day-old chicks

This project aims to understand whether in-ovo sexing technologies can be used to advance welfare within the UK poultry industry by reducing the number of male chicks killed at hatch annually. Unintentional welfare consequences that could result from a reduction in the supply of frozen chicks as an animal food source will also be considered.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 31 August 2023 and has been published on gov.uk.

International rehoming

This project will consider the welfare implications of the UK (or other regional descriptor) rehoming dogs from outside the UK, including advising on the scope of an externally commissioned research project.

Precision breeding and animal welfare

AWC members sit on the steering group that oversees a Defra-commissioned project undertaken by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to support the development of regulations under the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023. The primary aim of this research is to develop welfare assessments for precision bred animals, which will form part of the process of applying for an animal marketing authorisation.

This project has concluded, and the report has been published on Science Search (AW0521).

Welfare At Killing: Equines at slaughter

There is ongoing research regarding the welfare of equines at slaughter. This project will assess the results of this research and advise on the behavioural issues around pre-slaughter handling of equines in slaughterhouses.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 12 January 2024.

New Projects: 2023-24

Fur – responsible sourcing

This review will consider how much fur is imported in relation to which species, where this fur is sourced from, and where it is destined; what welfare standards or other safeguards apply to that fur, and how well they provide for welfare needs; what systems, schemes and other processes apply to imported fur to ensure that these standards and safeguards are complied with, and how well do they work, and; what traceability mechanisms and arrangements apply to imported fur, and how well do these mechanisms work.

Welfare implications of specialised canine reproductive practices

This project will review the welfare impacts associated with specialised canine breeding practices. It will consider canine fertility businesses, whelping services, and the welfare of popular 'designer' or 'status' dogs that are often the focus of such businesses, amongst other issues.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 21 March 2024.

Welfare implications of feline breeding practices

This project will review the welfare implications associated with the breeding of felines. It will consider the health and welfare impacts on the breeding cats and their offspring, the extent to which the breeding of hybrids and cats with genetic conditions is undertaken in GB, and whether these cats can have their welfare needs adequately met as pets.

Cat and dog welfare in transport

This project will consider cat and dog welfare during transport, including issues such as journey times and travel conditions.

This project will be undertaken as part of the workplan for 2024 to 2025.

Review of livestock breeding and breeding technologies

This is a follow-up to the Farm Animal Welfare Committee's (FAWC's) 2012 report on the welfare implications of breeding and breeding technologies in commercial livestock agriculture. This project will involve a systematic review of evidence to support AWC in taking forward this project and to provide the Government with a sound, up-to-date evidence base on livestock breeding and animal welfare.

Safeguarding and improving meat chicken welfare at high temperatures

This project will consider what further measures could be taken to protect and improve meat chicken welfare in extreme temperatures, following the mass mortalities of meat chickens in the heatwave of July 2022.

This project will be undertaken as part of the workplan for 2024 to 2025.

Non-cage systems for laying hens

This project will look at the welfare standards for keeping laying hens in non-cage systems without range access (barn systems).

This project will be undertaken as part of the workplan for 2024 to 2025.

Farrowing accommodation for pigs

This project will look at piglet mortality and the welfare issues related to sow confinement when using different farrowing systems.

This project has been removed from the workplan.

Welfare At Killing: Poultry culling and nitrogen foam

This project will explore the use of nitrogen generated high expansion foam for culling poultry and review the animal welfare aspects of this method.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 8 February 2024.

AWC Opinions and Small Reports 2023 to 2024

Scottish Code of Welfare for pigs

A review of the updated Scottish guidance for the welfare of pigs.

Views from AWC were submitted to the Scottish Government during October 2023. The updated guidance for the welfare of pigs is available on the Scottish Government website.

Welfare at Killing: Review of approval process for novel stunning methods

A review of Defra's proposed process for approval of novel stunning methods now that we have left the EU.

Older projects

Sheep mutilations

A review of the welfare issues surrounding mutilations in sheep, facilitated by the Scottish Government.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 27 September 2022 and has been published on gov.uk.

Welfare At Killing: Avian influenza advice

Potential emergency culling methods for depopulation of poultry affected by high pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) - focus on ventilation shutdown.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 5 June 2023 and has been published on gov.uk.

Welfare At Killing: Fish at slaughter

Consideration of fish slaughter methods and an update on the FAWC recommendations.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 16 February 2023 and has been published on gov.uk.

Poultry catching and handling

A review of improvements that might be made to catching, handling, transport and lairage infrastructure and practice for poultry. Identify welfare issues and potential improvements.

The AWC report was submitted to Government on 25 March 2023 and has been published on gov.uk.