



Animal Welfare Committee Workplan

Updated: October 2024

This document sets out the Animal Welfare Committee Work Plan. It outlines:

- projects which are ongoing
- projects which will be undertaken in the year ahead*
- projects completed over the past year

*The workplan may be subject to change and some projects may move into the following year.

Ongoing Projects

International rehoming

This project is to improve understanding of international rehoming of pet dogs by assessing the impact on dog welfare (both for dogs rehomed from abroad and the domestic population) as well as understanding the roles of key stakeholders.

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 involves 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.

Fur – responsible sourcing

This review considers 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.

Developing further evidence requirements for precision bred animals (Precision Breeding Part 2)

Defra have commissioned Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to carry out a second project to continue developing the evidence base for secondary legislation under the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023. An AWC working group has been maintained and refreshed to provide advice on precision breeding and the same group sits on the Steering Group for the research project.

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

A review of Defra's proposed process for approval of novel stunning methods.

Projects to be undertaken in the year ahead

How to safeguard the welfare of farmed animals from the effect of climate change – Part 1 poultry

This project will consider how best to safeguard poultry welfare (meat chickens, laying hens, ducks, turkeys, quail, geese) from the effects of climate change.

Non-cage systems for laying hens

This project will look at the welfare standards for keeping laying hens in non-cage systems.

Welfare of decapod crustaceans across the supply chain in the UK

This project will deliver a review of the welfare of decapod crustaceans in the UK. It will focus on animals that are caught, landed and handled (therefore under the protection of humans).

Comparison between current UK animal welfare standards, and the standards used/applied by other countries

This project will provide an understanding of the welfare implications of alternative welfare standards commonly used by countries other than the UK.

Welfare at Killing: Animal welfare impacts and effectiveness of the WATOK licence system in regulating the killing of animals outside of approved slaughterhouses

This project will review the WATOK licence system to assess its welfare benefits and limitations, and its effectiveness in ensuring demonstrable operator competence in the areas these licences are required for.

Welfare at Killing: High concentration CO2 stunning of pigs and alternatives

This project will review the evidence on the welfare impacts of high concentration CO2 gas stunning of pigs and of potential alternative methods.

Welfare at Killing: On-farm slaughter of animals to improve welfare

This project will review the suitability of on-farm slaughter for various species and classes of animals that will enter the human food chain and assess the potential welfare benefits and risks of on-farm slaughter.

Interaction between animal welfare standards and sustainability

This project will explore the interaction between animal welfare standards and sustainability in particular climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable food systems, including farm resilience.

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.

Projects completed over the past year

Welfare implications of feline breeding practices

This project reviewed the welfare implications associated with the breeding of felines. It considered 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.

The AWC report was submitted to government on 9 September 2024.

Welfare implications of specialised canine reproductive practices

This project reviewed the welfare impacts associated with specialised canine breeding practices. It considered 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.

Precision breeding and animal welfare (Precision Breeding Part 1)

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 was 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: Poultry culling and nitrogen foam

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

The AWC report was submitted to government on 8 February 2024 and has been published on GOV.UK.

Welfare At Killing: Equines at slaughter

There is ongoing research regarding the welfare of equines at slaughter. This project assessed the results of this research to date and advised on the behavioural issues around pre-slaughter handling of equines in slaughterhouses.

The AWC report was submitted to government on 12 January 2024 and has been published on GOV.UK

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 in October 2023. The updated guidance for the welfare of pigs is available on the Scottish Government website.