

Proposal on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability

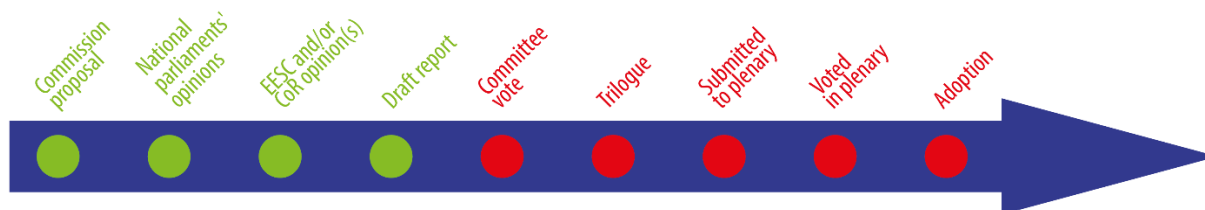
OVERVIEW

In the framework of the 'farm to fork' strategy, the Commission committed to a complete overhaul of the animal welfare rules. Accordingly, on 7 December 2023 it published a proposal on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, together with a proposal for a new regulation on animal welfare in transport.

At present, the rules on the protection of dog and cat welfare across the EU are not harmonised. The proposal therefore aims to establish EU standards for the breeding, housing and handling of pets in breeding establishments, pet shops and shelters. To combat the illegal trade in dogs and cats – a ruthless practice that is flourishing through online sales – the Commission seeks to reinforce the traceability of dogs and cats by introducing mandatory identification and registration in national databases.

In the European Parliament, the file has been assigned to the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), with Veronika Vrecionová (ECR, Czechia) as rapporteur.

Proposal on welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability		
<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)	COM(2023)769
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Veronika Vrecionová (ECR, Czechia)	7.12.2023 2023/0447(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Marlene Mortler (EPP, Germany) Achille Variati (S&D, Italy) Martin Hlaváček (Renew, Czechia) Tilly Metz (Greens/LU) Rosanna Conte (ID, Italy) Anja Hazekamp (GUE/NGL)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD)
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Publication of draft report	



Introduction

The [results](#) of the 2023 Eurobarometer on 'Attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare' showed that almost three quarters of EU citizens think that pet welfare should be better protected.

The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (iRASFF) is a tool developed to facilitate the exchange of information among member countries in order to enable prompt responses by food safety authorities in instances of risks to public health arising from the food chain. Since December 2019, animal welfare and animal health issues too can be notified through this platform, enabling competent authorities to exchange information about irregularities, cases of non-compliance and suspicions of fraud. Between 2022 and 2023, on the occasion of the [EU enforcement action on illegal trade of cats and dogs](#), almost half of the signals on [iRASFF](#) were about fraud – in the form of falsified pet passports, counterfeit health certificates and rabies antibodies titration reports, among others – committed in connection with the movement of dogs from third countries. Other signals were about sick puppies or dogs, some of which had to be put down because of the bad condition they were in, as well as about cases of mutilation such as ear cropping or tail docking.

In addition, the growing phenomenon of online sales of companion animals has led to the flourishing of illegal breeders, who cannot be tracked down by the national authorities due to the lack of a unified system of identification.

In 2020, when it introduced the 'farm to fork strategy', the Commission announced its intention to propose the adoption of a regulation on animal welfare in transport as part of the revision of the animal welfare rules. At the same time, it put forth a proposal for the EU's first-ever rules on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats. These rules aim to establish consistent EU standards for the breeding, housing and handling of these animals in breeding establishments, pet shops and shelters. Moreover, the rules seek to reinforce the traceability of dogs and cats through their mandatory identification and registration in national databases, thereby combating illegal trade and ensuring better living conditions in such establishments.

Existing situation

The requirements on the approval and registration of breeding establishments, together with the traceability requirements for identifying and registering pets involved in cross-border movements, are outlined in Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the Parliament and the Council (the [Animal Health Law](#)).

While [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2065](#) (the Digital Service Act) governs the responsibilities of providers of intermediary services online, including the traceability of traders, no specific EU rule governs the online sale of dogs or pets.

Similarly, there are EU rules on the [non-commercial movements of cats and dogs](#), rules on the [transport](#) of cats and dogs related to their age, and rules on the protection of pets when they are bred, supplied and used for [scientific purposes](#), yet no rules on the welfare of dogs and cats.

In addition, there are great disparities between EU Member States, particularly in terms of the distinction between professional and non-professional breeders, the minimum and maximum breeding ages, and the identification and registration processes for dogs and cats.

Parliament's starting position

In February 2020, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on protecting the EU's internal market and consumer rights from the negative effects of the illegal trade in companion animals. Parliament underlined that the illicit trade of pets poses a significant threat to animal welfare, public health and consumer protection. It furthermore highlighted that having a mandatory identification and registration system across the EU is essential in combating this illicit trade, and that the Commission should propose a detailed, EU-wide, compatible system for identification and registration of cats and dogs.

The Parliament also stressed the importance of microchipping and registration in national databases, with a clear link between the EU pet passport and the pet microchip registration, to ensure the full traceability of companion animals.

Council starting position

Denmark has had national legislation on the keeping and handling of dogs for commercial purposes since 2007. In 2022, the Danish delegation to the Council submitted an [information note](#) about Denmark's situation regarding the commercial keeping and sale of dogs. The delegation highlighted the high number of reports of imported dogs with health problems or with behavioural problems due to their early separation from their mothers. It called on the Commission to propose the adoption of common EU rules as part of the revision of the animal welfare legislation in the EU.

Preparation of the proposal

A fitness check on the EU animal welfare legislation highlighted the lack of protection for companion animals in the existing legislation. This aspect was also highlighted in stakeholders' interviews and bilateral meetings that the Commission held with dog breeders' organisations, the pet food industry, the online services industry, the pharmaceutical industry and animal welfare organisations.

As shown in the Eurobarometer survey [results](#) for 2023, 74 % of respondents think companion animals should have better protection than they have now.

In reply to the 2010 Council [conclusions](#) on the welfare of dogs and cats, the Commission published a [study](#) on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices in 2015.

In addition to the abovementioned Parliament resolution of 2020 and the Danish delegation's information note from 2022, the Commission took into account the [conclusions](#) of the EU Animal Welfare Platform voluntary initiatives on the welfare of pets (dogs and cats) and asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to adopt a scientific and technical report on welfare aspects related to the housing and health of cats and dogs in commercial breeding establishments.

The EFSA [report](#), published in September 2023, evaluated the presence (or lack) of scientific research supporting suggestions for implementing or avoiding certain housing conditions, healthcare practices or painful surgical procedures.

The changes the proposal would bring

The proposal on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability would introduce consistent EU standards governing their breeding, housing, handling and reproduction across breeding establishments, pet shops and shelters, and during transportation.

Below is a list of the key points in the proposal.

- Breeding: There would be a minimum age for breeding and a restriction on the reproductive rhythms.
- Breeding establishments: Mandatory registration is already in force through the Animal Health Law; the proposal introduces animal welfare rules to get the approval and the registration of these establishments.
- Housing: There would be more freedom of movement, in a cage-free environment, with more space for activities and outdoor/indoor access.
- Identification of pets and national databases: All cats and dogs would have to be identified by means of electronically-read transponders and registered in a national database, before they are placed on the market or supplied.

- Online sales: Suppliers would have to provide information on the identification and registration of dogs and cats through a website connected to national databases. This would allow buyers to verify the authenticity of their purchase.
- Entry into the EU: The proposal clarifies that the welfare conditions for pets entering the EU for the purpose of being placed on the market must be equivalent to those set by the proposal.

The proposal represents a significant milestone, since it will be the first time such comprehensive standards are enacted at the EU level. Furthermore, the proposal would reinforce existing measures to improve the traceability of dogs and cats distributed within the EU and contribute to the fight against illegal trafficking.

Advisory committees

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) issued an [opinion](#) on the proposal on 26 February 2024. The EESC is pleased with the proposal and calls for cooperation between Member States, stakeholders, NGOs and international partners to reach the proposals' goals. The EESC calls for the Commission to ensure that the additional costs that both breeders and dealers will have to face to adapt to the new requirements will be seen as an investment. Moreover, the EESC calls for the Commission to introduce rules on penalties for infringement of the rules. The EESC agrees that a system of identification and registration of dogs and cats in the EU should ease the traceability of the animals' origin, including their medical history and owners, which is key to improving animal welfare, combating illegal trade and making breeders and sellers more responsible.

National parliaments

The deadline for the submission of reasoned opinions on the grounds of subsidiarity was 15 March 2024. Of the 13 national parliaments that made information about their [scrutiny](#) of the proposal available, the only one to raise concerns was the Czech Chamber of Deputies, in a [resolution](#) of 14 February 2024.

Stakeholder views¹

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) [welcomed](#) the Commission proposal, emphasising that, for the first time, EU rules will protect companion animals in breeding establishments, pet shops and shelters.

Similarly, the animal welfare NGO Four Paws [greeted](#) the proposal, which came in after the group had accomplished extensive work on illegal pet trade together with the Commission services. Four Paws is willing to cooperate with Member States and Members of European Parliament for the inclusion of rules on the protection of exotic pets against illegal trade in the proposal.

Satisfaction was also shown by the animal welfare group Eurogroup for Animals, which [recognised](#) the importance of having uniform EU rules on the traceability of cats and dogs, breeding practices and imported animals. However, they asked for tighter measures for online sales.

A [public consultation](#) is open until 14 March 2024.

Legislative process

The Commission proposal was published and submitted to the Parliament and the Council on 7 December 2023.

In Parliament, the file was assigned to the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), with Veronika Vrecionová (ECR, Czechia) as rapporteur. The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) was appointed as the committee for opinion. The AGRI committee rapporteur must now draft her report.

SOURCES

[Welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability](#), Legislative Observatory (OEL), European Parliament.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'European Parliament supporting analysis'.

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