

Animal welfare and competitiveness of EU livestock producers

The European Commission (EC) is the executive body of the European Union (EU) that represents and upholds the interests of the EU as a whole. Part of the role of the EC is to promote animal welfare and earlier this year the Commission published a Report on the impact of animal welfare international activities on the competitiveness of European livestock producers in a globalised world.

The Report is largely based on a study published in 2017: ‘Study on the Impact of Animal Welfare International Activities’, which was carried out to provide data for the EC and to analyse the impact of EU international activities on the competitiveness of EU livestock producers and operators. The study covers the time-period 2004 to 2015.

The Report opens by stating that “Promoting animal welfare and fair competition globally remains one of the Commission’s priorities on animal welfare”. It then goes on to describe the Commission’s international activities, including multilateral activities (such as supporting the development and adoption of OIE standards) and bilateral activities (such as raising awareness of animal welfare and sharing technical knowledge). The Report also describes how animal welfare research, supported by the Commission, has contributed to providing a scientific basis for the development of international animal welfare standards and guidelines.

When considering how animal welfare international activities have affected competitiveness for EU and non-EU producers, four factors were assessed: productivity and cost competitiveness; market access; trade distortions; and, capacity to innovate.

The Commission drew fourteen conclusions in all. The Commission considers itself to have: “played a prominent and decisive role in raising global awareness on animal welfare and significant results have been achieved” (Conclusion 3). Crucially, the Commission conclude that: “Animal welfare standards have a limited impact overall on the competitiveness of EU producers on world markets” (Conclusion 12), and that: “Overall costs of compliance with animal welfare standards remain very low when compared to other production costs that affect global competitiveness and influence world trade patterns”.

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Impact of Animal Welfare International Activities on the Competitiveness of European Livestock Producers in a Globalised World (26 January 2018). A4, 9 pages. European Commission, Brussels, Belgium COM (2018) 42 Final. Available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/aw_international_publication-report_en.pdf.

Study on the Impact of Animal Welfare International Activities (2017). A4, 217 pages. Report submitted to the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) by a grouping of consulting firms and research institutions led by Economisti Associati Srl and including Areté Consulting. <http://doi.org/10.2875/745687>.

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The welfare of wild animals in circuses

The number of wild animals in travelling circuses is small — at the end of the 2017 touring season there were only two travelling circuses and the licenses covered 19 animals (six reindeer, four zebra, three camels, three racoons, a fox, a macaw, and a zebu). However, for a number of years, ethical concerns have been raised over the keeping of wild animals in travelling circuses and six years ago, in response to these concerns, the Government introduced the Welfare of Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (England) Regulations 2012.

The aim of these Regulations was to promote and ensure high standards of welfare for all wild animals used in travelling circuses within England and they require any travelling circuses to obtain a licence from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). To obtain a licence the circus must satisfy certain criteria and also meet ten specific licence conditions, including: acquisition of animals; notification of tour itinerary; regular veterinary care of licensed wild animals; wild animal records; individual and group care plans; amongst others.

Part of the Regulations require that a review into their effectiveness be carried out five years after coming into force. Defra has carried out this review and published the findings in a Post Implementation Review 2018. The Review considers that the Regulations have successfully promoted and monitored high standards of welfare for wild animals in travelling circuses in England and states that: “Over the five years the scheme has been in force, over 90% of licensing conditions/standards appear to have been met first time”.

The Regulations were not meant to act as a lasting piece of legislation, and part of the Regulations states that they will cease to have an effect seven years after they came into force. It is the Government’s intention that a legislative ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses is introduced before this point, therefore the Regulations will expire on 19 January 2020.

Additional background information on the use of wild animals in circuses and the progress of legislation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland may be found in a briefing paper written by Elena Ares: ‘Briefing Paper: Wild Animals in Circuses’.