

Philosophy, policy and procedures of the World Organisation for Animal Health for the development of standards in animal welfare

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Summary

Animal welfare was identified as a priority for the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in the 2001-2005 OIE Strategic Plan. Member Countries recognised that, as animal protection is a complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes important scientific, ethical, economic and political dimensions, the OIE needed to develop a detailed vision and strategy incorporating and balancing these dimensions.

A permanent working group on animal welfare was established in order to provide guidance to the OIE in its work on the development of science-based standards and guidelines. The Working Group decided to give priority to the welfare of animals used in agriculture and aquaculture, and that, within those groups, the topics of transportation, slaughter for human consumption and killing for disease control purposes would be addressed first.

Some guiding principles were approved by the International Committee of OIE Member Countries during the 72nd General Session in May 2004, and these have been followed by four specific guidelines on the priority topics listed above.

Keywords

Animal transport – Animal welfare – Killing of animals – Slaughter – World Organisation for Animal Health.

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, there has been an inexorable and substantial move towards more intensive systems of animal production, especially in the more densely populated nations of Europe, Asia and North America. More extensive systems of production continue to be practised in Oceania, South America and Africa, for grazing species, and there is a strong public perception that more extensive management systems are synonymous with better welfare (2). Expanding human populations, urbanisation and income growth are expected to continue the trend in intensive production systems and the question has been asked as to whether it is time to renew the science of animal husbandry to ensure that animals are better protected (1). The recent animal health emergencies in Europe due to the appearance (or re-appearance) of some major infectious diseases have led to the killing of millions of animals. This has engendered a

significant debate among the 167 Member Countries of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on the ethics and welfare aspects of some modern production systems. The linkage between historical cultural attitudes to animals and their use in modern agricultural systems has also been discussed.

Some countries have argued that animal welfare should be brought within the ambit of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), but others fear that this could be the basis for new types of unjustified barriers to trade.

In parallel with the debate on 'animal welfare and international trade', important initiatives have been taken by some food producers and retailers to include animal welfare within the term 'food quality', proposing that the standards of welfare under which animals are produced are

effectively a quality characteristic of the products consumed (2, 3).

The OIE has historically made a major indirect contribution to animal welfare globally, via the organisation's involvement in the control and eradication of significant animal diseases, and in its inclusion in its *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (the *Code*) of a section on animal welfare principles applying to transport. During the 1993 OIE General Session, the OIE International Committee recognised that animal health and animal welfare were inextricably linked and that one could not be considered without the other (4). In 1994, the OIE published 'Animal welfare and Veterinary Services' in the *Scientific and Technical Review* series (5).

Animal welfare was identified as a priority in the 2001-2005 OIE Strategic Plan. OIE Member Countries had decided that, as the international reference organisation for animal health and zoonoses, the OIE must provide international leadership on animal welfare. Even though animal welfare may not be explicitly referenced in the WTO SPS Agreement, Member Countries wished to have guidelines and recommendations to assist them in international trade and in bilateral negotiations.

Member Countries recognised that, as animal welfare is a complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes important scientific, ethical, economic and political dimensions, the OIE needed to develop a detailed vision and strategy incorporating and balancing these dimensions.

The OIE was aware of the importance of the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in this complex topic and is collaborating with various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including those from academia, the research community, industry and relevant organisations, to ensure the best outcomes. The OIE was keen to make use of all available expertise and resources, but decided that the organisations presenting advice must represent a broad international view, as standards, guidelines and recommendations developed by the OIE are applicable to all its Member Countries.

In order to implement the new mandate, a permanent working group on animal welfare was established by the International Committee in 2002.

Development of OIE standards

The development of the standards, guidelines and recommendations in the OIE *Codes* (*Terrestrial* and *Aquatic*) (6, 7) is the result of continuous work by the OIE's Specialist Commissions. These Commissions draw upon the expertise of internationally renowned specialists, many

of whom come from OIE Collaborating Centres and Reference Laboratories (which together constitute a global network of over 160 facilities worldwide).

An issue or problem may be identified by an OIE Delegate, an independent expert, a partner organisation, or one of the Specialist Commission themselves, on the basis of new scientific information (e.g. from research) or a suggested new approach. The issue is then addressed by the appropriate Specialist Commission using advice from an expert, an *ad hoc* group, another Commission or OIE Reference Laboratories/Collaborating Centres. The Specialist Commission then prepares draft texts for new articles in the *Code* or proposes revisions of existing articles, and these are circulated for comment to Delegates of Member Countries, experts and organisations. The proposed text is then discussed by Delegates at the next annual General Session with two options – the proposal may be discussed only and returned for further work, or it may be adopted by consensus as an OIE international standard.

The OIE Working Group on Animal Welfare

The Working Group on Animal Welfare was established in order to provide international leadership in animal welfare through overseeing the development of science-based OIE standards and guidelines, providing expert advice and promoting relevant education and research. At its first meeting, in October 2002, the Working Group saw as its primary task the development of policies and guiding principles to provide a sound foundation from which to elaborate draft guidelines and standards for the identified priorities. The Working Group decided that specific topics would be addressed through *ad hoc* groups utilising expertise inside and outside government.

The Working Group decided to give priority to the welfare of animals used in agriculture and aquaculture, and that, within those groups, the topics of transportation (by land and sea), slaughter for human consumption and killing for disease control purposes would be addressed first, followed by housing and management. Other topics, such as research animals and wildlife, were to be addressed as resources permitted.

In this complex subject, the OIE was aware of the need to address as wide a range of views as possible and the membership of the Working Group and the various *ad hoc* groups reflected the required broad geographical, scientific and cultural diversity.

The current members of the OIE Working Group are Dr David Bayvel (Director, Animal Welfare, Biosecurity

New Zealand), Professor David Fraser (Professor and Chair in Animal Welfare, University of British Columbia, Canada), Dr Andrea Gavinelli (Administrator, European Commission Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General, Belgium), Dr Walter Masiga (Kenya), Professor Hassan Aidaros (Professor of Preventive Medicine, Egypt), Dr Sira Abdul Rahman (Retired Dean, Bangalore Veterinary College, India), Dr David Wilkins (Co-ordinator, International Coalition for Farm Animal Welfare, United Kingdom) and Professor Tore Håstein (National Veterinary Institute, Norway).

Recognising the importance of the OIE being transparent in its policy development, the Working Group discussed the best methods of working with relevant NGOs to the benefit of all parties. As a result, a conference on animal welfare was held to explain the OIE's strategy and work, and to seek NGO proposals on how they could work with the OIE within their areas of interest (see the section entitled OIE Global Conference on animal welfare).

The Working Group set up and established terms of reference for *ad hoc* groups covering:

- land transport of animals
- transport of animals by sea
- slaughter of animals for human consumption
- killing of animals for disease control purposes.

These *ad hoc* groups comprise internationally renowned experts in their field. Recognising the sensitive issues involved in the development of animal welfare standards, but also that the OIE would need to make progress in that direction, the Working Group recommended that the four *ad hoc* groups initially develop more detailed statements on policies and principles, specific to their subject, as a bridge between the generic OIE statement on policies and principles, and future specific animal welfare standards.

The Working Group also requested that the OIE address the following issues:

- raising awareness of animal welfare in undergraduate teaching
- raising awareness of animal welfare research needs and funding requirements
- promoting collaboration among academic and research institutions.

It also noted the importance of an effective communications plan.

Guiding principles for animal welfare and the scientific basis for guidelines

The Working Group developed guiding principles and established the scientific basis for the subsequent guidelines in animal welfare. These were adopted by the International Committee during the 72nd General Session in May 2004, and may be found in Section 3.7 of the 2004 *Terrestrial Code* (7).

Guiding principles for animal welfare

The eight guiding principles developed by the Working Group are as follows:

a) that there is a critical relationship between animal health and animal welfare

b) that the internationally recognised 'five freedoms' (freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour) provide valuable guidance in animal welfare

c) that the internationally recognised 'Three Rs' (reduction in numbers of animals, refinement of experimental methods and replacement of animals with non-animal techniques) provide valuable guidance for the use of animals in science

d) that the scientific assessment of animal welfare involves diverse elements which need to be considered together, and that selecting and weighing these elements often involves value-based assumptions which should be made as explicit as possible

e) that the use of animals in agriculture and science, and for companionship, recreation and entertainment, makes a major contribution to the well-being of people

f) that the use of animals carries with it an ethical responsibility to ensure the welfare of such animals to the greatest extent practicable

g) that improvements in farm animal welfare can often improve productivity and food safety, and hence lead to economic benefits

h) that equivalent outcomes (performance criteria), rather than identical systems (design criteria), be the basis for comparison of animal welfare standards and guidelines.

Scientific basis for guidelines

In addition to the above principles, the Working Group also drafted a list of points governing the scientific approach to the development of future guidelines:

- a) welfare is a broad term which includes the many elements that contribute to an animal's quality of life, including those referred to in the 'five freedoms' listed above
- b) the scientific assessment of animal welfare has progressed rapidly in recent years and forms the basis of these guidelines
- c) some measures of animal welfare involve assessing the degree of impaired functioning associated with injury, disease, and malnutrition. Other measures provide information on animals' needs and affective states such as hunger, pain and fear, often by measuring the strength of animals' preferences, motivations and aversions. Others assess the physiological, behavioural and immunological changes or effects that animals show in response to various challenges
- d) such measures can lead to criteria and indicators that help to evaluate how different methods of managing animals influence their welfare.

Policies

The Working Group has also drafted policies which the OIE will adhere to in undertaking its animal welfare role:

- a) that it will make appropriate use of international scientific expertise in the development of animal welfare guidelines and standards
- b) that, in addition to the use of established consultation processes, the OIE will consult with NGO and industry stakeholder interests which can demonstrate a broad-based approach to the issues
- c) that it will encourage the teaching of animal welfare and animal ethics in veterinary and other undergraduate curricula around the world
- d) that it will encourage the identification of animal welfare research needs and the provision of public and private sector funds to address these needs
- e) that it will encourage science-based methods to assess animal welfare outcomes
- f) that OIE's initial priorities for animal welfare will be animals in agriculture and aquaculture particularly relating to transport, humane slaughter, and killing for disease control

g) that it will take into account regional and cultural dimensions

h) that it will use communication tools appropriate to audiences.

The OIE Global Conference on animal welfare

Over 400 participants from 63 countries and representatives from 20 international organisations gathered in Paris in February 2004 for the OIE Global Conference on animal welfare.

The Conference participants included many government officials, the Chief Veterinary Officers of numerous OIE Member Countries, scientists, representatives from NGOs, animal welfare activists and private sector professionals working in animal health and production (9).

The objectives of the Conference were as follows:

- to give visibility to the OIE's work and to explain the OIE's strategy on animal welfare to the widest number of stakeholders, and to obtain their support
- to enhance the OIE's leadership role in providing global animal welfare guidance and standards
- to examine the role of stakeholders in the framework of the OIE standards development process and to establish the most effective way in which they can contribute
- to stimulate links with international organisations liable to support the OIE's work and to agree on how they can best contribute
- to consider the future role of the OIE in animal welfare issues and its influence on decision-making in Member Countries
- to support the OIE in a science-based approach to the welfare of animals, including the provision of international guidance and standards.

The issues raised in the various discussion groups included:

- the importance of science-based standards
- the importance of commitment to continuous improvement through incremental change
- the importance of the animal handler/carer in ensuring the achievement of animal welfare objectives
- the need to clarify the legal significance of the WTO SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade Agreements, in relation to animal welfare and international trade

- the successful track record of the OIE *ad hoc* group model in providing expert international opinion on specific animal welfare topics
- the respective merits of voluntary, as opposed to compulsory, standards
- the respective merits of outcome-based, as opposed to prescriptive (input-based) standards.

The discussion groups also identified a number of important issues which will pose a challenge to the implementation of the animal welfare initiative, as follows:

- the need for science-based standards to take into account regional, religious and cultural issues
- the need to better coordinate animal welfare research internationally
- the need to promote the teaching of animal welfare and ethics at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and as part of ongoing professional development programmes
- the need to actively involve all OIE Member Countries in the implementation of the initiative and to ensure that effective communication and consultation with stakeholders take place in each country
- the need to harness available resources and information
- the need to ensure that expectations of the OIE role are realistic in relation to resource availability
- the need for the OIE to clearly focus on agreed priorities.

More than 120 of the OIE's Member Countries are developing/transition countries. The representatives of those countries at the Conference clearly indicated their interest in developing animal welfare in their countries, but they also stressed that this will be a long term project and that the constraints on them will have to be taken into account (8).

The OIE Working Group on animal welfare believes that future conferences should be more narrowly focused and perhaps aligned with particular interests or needs at a regional level. From its point of view, the principal conference outcomes were:

- an enhanced understanding of the OIE's mandate, procedures, work to date and aims regarding animal welfare by a diverse group of participants, some of which had never before dealt with the OIE
- an appreciation of the challenges of animal welfare as a global issue
- a very strong endorsement of OIE's leadership role in animal welfare
- the initiation of a positive dialogue.

The OIE *ad hoc* groups

In May 2005, as a result of the work of the four *ad hoc* groups during 2003 and 2004, the Terrestrial Code Commission proposed new chapters for adoption concerning: land transport of animals, transport of animals by sea, killing of animals for diseases control purposes and slaughter of animals for human consumption (further details of the work of the four *ad hoc* groups can be found in other papers in this issue of the *Review*, i.e. Broom, Norris, Galvin and Shimshony).

The proposed chapters were approved by the International Committee during the May 2005 OIE General Session.

Animal welfare work programme

The Working Group has identified the following priorities for future work:

- further development of the four prioritised topics
- cooperation and coordination with NGOs to enable better utilisation of their welfare expertise
- enhanced communications
- animal welfare in the veterinary curriculum
- terrestrial animal housing and management
- aquatic animal welfare.

Conclusion

The OIE has made significant progress in assuming a global leadership role on animal welfare. It understands that change will take time and that the needs of all OIE Member Countries have to be addressed. The OIE has demonstrated that it is committed to communication, consultation, continuous improvement and incremental change. The concept of approaching animal welfare change management on a global rather than on a national or regional basis, represents a significant concept shift.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their gratitude to the members of the OIE Working Group on animal welfare and the members of the *ad hoc* groups on the land transport of animals, the transport of animals by sea, the killing of animals for disease control purposes and the slaughter of animals for human consumption.

Philosophie, politique et procédures de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale pour l'élaboration de normes relatives au bien-être animal

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Résumé

Le bien-être animal a été défini comme prioritaire pour l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale (OIE) dans le cadre du Plan stratégique 2001-2005 de l'OIE. Considérant que la protection animale est une question d'intérêt général complexe présentant de multiples facettes, notamment d'importants aspects scientifiques, éthiques, économiques et politiques, les Pays Membres ont estimé que l'OIE devait construire une philosophie et une stratégie intégrant de façon équilibrée ces différents aspects.

Un Groupe de travail permanent sur le bien-être animal a été mis en place afin d'assurer à l'OIE une orientation dans ses travaux axés sur l'élaboration de normes et de lignes directrices fondées sur des critères scientifiques. Le Groupe de travail a décidé de s'attacher en priorité au bien-être des animaux utilisés en agriculture et en aquaculture, traitant en premier lieu les questions liées à leur transport, leur abattage aux fins de la consommation humaine et leur élimination à des fins prophylactiques.

Des principes directeurs ont été approuvés par le Comité international des Pays Membres de l'OIE lors de la 72^e Session générale de mai 2004, principes qui ont été suivis par quatre séries de lignes directrices applicables aux sujets prioritaires définis plus haut.

Mots-clés

Abattage – Bien-être animal – Élimination des animaux – Organisation mondiale de la santé animale – Transport des animaux.



Filosofía, política y procedimientos de la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal para la elaboración de normas de bienestar animal

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Resumen

En su Plan Estratégico para 2001-2005, la Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal (OIE) definía el bienestar animal como uno de sus temas prioritarios de trabajo. Los Países Miembros entendieron que, dada la complejidad del tema de la protección de los animales, su carácter poliédrico y su vertiente normativa internacional, con una importante dimensión científica, ética, económica y política, la OIE tenía que definir una visión y una estrategia detalladas que tuvieran en cuenta esas dimensiones y buscaran un equilibrio entre ellas.

Para orientar a la OIE en la empresa de elaborar normas y directrices científicamente fundamentadas se creó un Grupo de Trabajo permanente sobre el tema del bienestar animal. Dicho Grupo decidió dar prioridad al bienestar de los animales utilizados en agricultura y acuicultura y, dentro de ese subconjunto, abordar ante todo los temas del transporte, el sacrificio para el consumo humano y la matanza con fines de control sanitario.

En su 72ª Sesión General, celebrada en mayo de 2004, el Comité Internacional de Países Miembros de la OIE aprobó algunos principios orientadores, a partir de los cuales se han elaborado cuatro series de directrices dedicadas específicamente a los aludidos temas prioritarios.

Palabras clave

Bienestar animal – Matanza de animales – Organización Mundial de Sanidad Animal – Sacrificio – Transporte de animales.



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