

Reports and Comments

AVMA 2016 slaughter guidelines

In July of last year (2016) the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) released 'Guidelines for the Humane Slaughter of Animals: 2016 Edition'. The species covered are hoofed stock (cattle, bison, horses, mules, sheep, goats, swine, deer and elk), poultry (chickens, turkeys, pheasants, ratites, geese and ducks), fish (farmed and commercially caught wild fish), rabbits and alligators. The guidelines are provided specifically for animals which are reared and slaughtered for human food consumption (estimated by the Humane Society to be 4.6 billion animals annually), and do not include animals raised and killed for their fur, skins or any other product.

The document is a result of 12 years of work by 15 individuals including veterinarians, animal scientists and an ethicist. For the commercially produced hoofed stock species (cattle, calves, horses, mules, sheep and swine) already included in the federal Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act (1978), these AVMA recommendations extend an additional, higher tier of welfare standards. For species not covered by enforceable nationwide legislation (ie bison, deer, elk, poultry, fish, rabbits and alligators), the new AVMA publication provides a solid foundation offering practical guidance on unloading from vehicles, handling and humane slaughter. For some species, it is the first time such a publication has been produced in the USA and it is hoped this will help to safeguard animal welfare throughout the slaughter process.

The guidelines are divided into six parts starting with a general introduction followed by the history of animal welfare legislation and enforcement in the USA. The authors recognise the importance of maintaining welfare from the time the animals arrive at the abattoir to confirmation of death. The guidelines offer advice on good handling practices during unloading and in the lairage and also propose alterations in slaughterhouse design to ease the movement of animals through the facility. Species-specific stunning and killing methods are clearly explained along with physiological indicators which should be applied to confirm loss of consciousness and death. Part five is dedicated to unique special issues and areas requiring additional consideration. This includes topics such as emergency killing in the lairage and the less conventional methods required to humanely slaughter species, such as rabbits, ratites, fish and alligators. In each section, potential problems and practical means of correction are given in order to help operators improve the welfare of animals in their plants. The final part of the document covers facilities in which religious slaughter is performed for the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The AVMA guidance document is the second in a three-part series providing veterinarians with scientifically based, practical advice on the most humane methods available for the killing of animals. The first in the series was the 'Guidance of Euthanasia' which was previously reviewed in the August 2013 issue of *Animal Welfare* (22 [3]). Part three is expected to be released later this year. It will focus on the 'Depopulation of Animals' and will address the methods suitable for use during disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

AVMA Guidelines for the Humane Slaughter of Animals: 2016 Edition (2016). A4, 64 pages. American Veterinary Medical Association, Schaumburg, IL, USA. Available free of charge at: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/AnimalWelfare/Documents/Humane-Slaughter-Guidelines.pdf>.

S Richmond,

HSA

Guidelines for wildlife rehabilitation centres

The British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS) has recently published 'Good Practice Guidelines for Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres'. The BVZS note that there is a lack of legislation intended to specifically protect the welfare of injured or displaced indigenous wild animals in the United Kingdom (UK) that may require treatment, rehabilitation and, where appropriate, release. The welfare of wild animals instead falls, to various extents, under a variety of legislative Acts, including: The Animal Welfare Act (2006); The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981); Zoo Licensing Act (1981); and the Dangerous Wild Animals Act (1976).

According to the BVZS the "comparatively weak framework of regulation has resulted in variable care of wildlife casualties throughout the UK and has on occasion led to members of the veterinary profession being investigated by their Regulator, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons".

The BVZS state that the primary aim of a wildlife centre should always be "to return an animal successfully to the wild with a chance of survival and potential to reproduce, at least equivalent to that of other free-living members of its species". Emphasis is placed on wildlife centres only admitting species for which they have facilities, space, and appropriate knowledge and that where a centre is unable to provide a full spectrum of care (ie primary first aid, secondary treatment, and rehabilitation), this should be recognised and provision made for care to be carried out elsewhere.

The main body of the guidelines explain in more detail what factors should be considered to protect the welfare of wild animal casualties under the following headings: Animal accommodation; Provision of food and water; Observation and record-keeping; Safety and security; Veterinary care; Transportation; Release; Staff and training; Education; and Independent ethical review.

Additionally, included within the Appendices, is a section covering the training and qualifications required for the legal treatment of wildlife casualties (including a useful summary table).

The guidelines provide a framework for good practice and should be a useful resource for both wildlife rehabilitation centres and veterinary surgeons.

Good Practice Guidelines for Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres (October 2016). A4, 42 pages. British Veterinary Zoological Society. Available online at: http://www.bvzs.org/images/uploads/BVZS_Good_Practice_Guidelines_for_Wildlife_Centres_011016_.pdf.

E Carter;

UFAW

House of Commons report on animal welfare in England

Last year (2016) marked the 10-year anniversary of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The Act consolidated more than 20 other pieces of legislation and introduced a positive ‘duty of care’ towards animals. However, it did not provide detailed measures to protect animal welfare, but instead offered the means to introduce further, secondary, legislation to address areas of specific welfare concern where considered necessary (such as: riding schools; livery yards; animal [dog and cat] boarding; pet shops; pet fairs; mutilations; tethering horses; animal sanctuaries; greyhounds; and performing animals).

In February 2016, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee launched an inquiry into the welfare of domestic pets in England, with the following Terms of Reference: “to examine the effectiveness of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 with regards to domestic pets; the Regulation surrounding the sale of domestic pets, including online sale and advertising; enforcement of current animal welfare legislation, including prosecution of offences by the police, local authorities, the RSPCA and others; and comparative approaches to enforcement in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales”.

The four main areas of interest when considering the Animal Welfare Act 2006, were: the use of secondary legislation under the Act; the role of the Act in protecting progeny; awareness of the Act; and enforcement of the Act.

Oral and written evidence was gathered from a number of sources (including: animal welfare charities; local

government; industry representatives; veterinary representatives; and academics; amongst others) and the Committee also visited a dog and cat home, a commercial breeder, and an animal rescue centre.

The bulk of the inquiry focuses on dogs, in particular the breeding and selling of dogs. The market for puppies in the United Kingdom is large and figures given in the report estimate that between 700,000 and 1.9 million puppies are sold each year, valued between £100 million and £300 million. There are various concerns about the breeding and selling of dogs, notably: unlicensed breeders; the regulation and enforcement of the licensing regime; outdated legislation that does not reflect current animal welfare knowledge; sales of dogs through third-party sellers; and internet advertising.

The report notes that: “Breeders have an important responsibility to provide for the social development and broader welfare requirements for puppies in their care. We recommend that the legislation governing the breeding of dogs should be updated with a licensing regime based on modern welfare standards”.

Importation of puppies from other countries via the EU Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) is another major concern. Figures given within the report show a large increase between 2011 and 2015 of dog imports from Lithuania, Hungary, and Romania — 761,850 and 2055%, respectively. The welfare of imported puppies is frequently poor due to inadequate breeding conditions, premature weaning, and excessive journeys (often over 1,000 miles). Importation of disease, falsified puppy passports and poor border controls at British ports are also a problem.

The report goes on to consider the breeding of cats. Unlike dogs, there is no legislation specifically protecting the welfare of breeding cats and consequently this section is much shorter. Welfare concerns centre around poor breeding conditions and irresponsible breeding. It is therefore recommended that “breeders of cats of two litters or more should be licensed, with welfare conditions attached”, and that “the Government undertakes further research on the sale of cats and proposes recommendations to improve the trade”.

Horse welfare is also briefly considered, specifically equine identification and traceability. Although all horses are required to have a passport for identification (since February 2005) and a microchip (if born after July 2009), there are over 60 Passport Issuing Organisations and they vary considerably in quality. Additionally, there is no central database to report to since the closure of the National Equine Database in 2012. This makes the reporting and enforcement of equine identification laws, and welfare concerns, difficult.

A more general look at the enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is also discussed. One problem high-