

considerations, review of animal care and welfare standards, and advising on staff training and other matters. Once the local ethical review system is established, project licence applications will not be considered by the Home Office until the project has been subjected to the local system, although the Home Office will be happy to discuss ideas and to provide advice.

This is a significant change in the operation of the ASPA. The ethical review process is also seen as having a promotional and educational role – both for those involved in research and for those who are not. These are laudable aims. Providing they do not lead to a blurring of responsibilities, the establishment of local ethical review systems in the UK is to be welcomed.

The Ethical Review Process. The Home Office (1998). 3pp. Loose-leaf notes. Available from the Home Office, Constitutional & Community Policy Directorate, Animals, Byelaws & Coroners Unit, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT. Free.

Proposed EU Directive on protection of laying hens

This long-awaited proposal from the European Commission is based on the Scientific Veterinary Committee's 1996 report on the welfare of laying hens. The proposal is to replace Directive 88/166/EEC, which lays down minimum standards for hens kept in battery cages, with a new Directive covering the welfare of all laying hens. This introduces requirements for the provision of nests, perches and litter for dustbathing, but makes derogations for the continued use of existing cages for several years.

Article 3 of the proposed Directive requires, that from 1 January 1999 all new systems must provide at least one individual nest box per 8 hens, or at least 1 m² of nest space per 100 birds if communal nests are used. It also requires provision of adequate perching facilities and litter for dustbathing. However, until 1 January 2009, it proposes that member states may authorize derogations about the provision of nest boxes and dust baths under specified conditions, namely: if hens each have at least 800cm² space; if cages are at least 50cm high; and providing birds do not have their beaks trimmed.

The use of existing cages – those in use on 1 January 1999 – will be permitted for 10 years, providing that they allow at least 450cm² per bird and meet various other criteria which are consistent with current battery cage designs. However, cages which are more than 10 years old on 1 January 1999 must be phased out within 4 years. This falls short of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendation that the present Directive be amended to require a minimum floor space of 600m² per hen in all battery cages within 5 years.

General conditions for laying hens are set out in an annex to Article 5 of the proposed Directive. These cover points concerning, for example, cage and equipment cleaning, air quality and thermal environment, lighting, and feeding. All birds must be inspected twice daily and daily written records of these inspections and any actions taken must be kept and available to the recognized authority.

Article 9 makes provision for future improvements by requiring the Commission to submit a report on systems of rearing and keeping hens to the European Council and Parliament by 2006. This is to include appropriate proposals to phase out systems that do not meet welfare requirements.

The proposed Directive has been referred for consideration by an official working party comprising representatives of all member states and the Commission; the European Parliament

and the Economic and Social Committee are also being consulted. Barring hold-ups or snags, the intention is for the Directive to proceed – requiring all member states to put all necessary laws and provisions for compliance in place by 1st January 1999.

Proposal for an EU Directive Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Protection of Laying Hens Kept in Various Systems of Rearing. Commission of the European Communities (1998). Office for Official Publications of the European Communities: Luxembourg. 12pp. Loose-leaf. Available from Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L-2985, Luxembourg (Catalogue No. CB-CO-98-166-EN-C; ISBN 92-78-32088-9). Free.

Revision of the *Sheep Welfare Code*

The original *Sheep Welfare Code* was published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in 1983. In response to a number of recommendations in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's 1994 report on the welfare of sheep, MAFF, the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department and the Welsh Office Agriculture Department have now drafted a revised edition and are consulting on this. As well as seeking to make the report more user-friendly, the authors have placed clearer emphasis on the need for written health and welfare programmes and the importance of good stockmanship; they have also provided detailed advice on some key welfare aspects, such as dealing with lameness and the value of condition scoring in good husbandry.

The Code sets out key points relevant to the husbandry and welfare of sheep under the following headings: stockmanship, feed and water, health, management, breeding techniques, pregnancy and lambing, artificial rearing, housing, hazards, and milk sheep. The largest sections are those on health and management. The range of topics covered seems well-judged and, although the document adheres to a formal Code format, enough background and detail is presented to help justify and explain the provisions where necessary.

Among the points included in the section on stockmanship, is that specific stockmanship skills are required by those caring for sheep. These skills may be developed on-farm by working with an experienced person, or through a suitable training course. However, the draft document states that the training should be of a type which leads to formal recognition of competence. A list of training organizations is to be included as an appendix. The draft Code states that a written health and welfare programme, covering the yearly production cycle, should be prepared for each flock. It should, at least, cover vaccination, parasite control, and foot care regimes; be developed with appropriate veterinary and technical advice; and be updated each year.

Following the consultation period, the Code will be subject to Parliamentary approval and adoption under the *Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968*.

Draft Sheep Welfare Code. Draft for Consultation. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1998). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 39pp. Paperback. Available from MAFF, Government Buildings, Hook Rise South, Tolworth KT6 7NF, UK. Free.

Significance of countryside sports

This report, an update of one published in 1992, reviews diverse aspects of the countryside sports industry. It provides data on the number of people in the UK involved in various forms of hunting, shooting and fishing, on the economic value of these activities, and on their relevance to wildlife conservation. It is based on some original survey work but draws heavily on reports