

Cross Party Group on Animal Welfare Meeting
6.00pm Tuesday 20 June 2017
Committee Room 2

Present:

MSPs Christine Grahame MSP (Convener)
Colin Smyth MSP

Associate Members Jane Stirling, Edinburgh Napier University
Alex Campbell
Patricia Saluja, University of Aberdeen
Mary Luke, Advocates for Rabbit Welfare
Rhona O'Malley, Advocates for Rabbit Welfare
Harry Huyton, OneKind
Leanne McPake, World Horse Welfare
Kirsteen Mackenzie, Perth and Kinross Council
David Woolfries, Stirling Council
John Gaffney
Peter Macdonald, Horse Rescue Scotland
Penny McIntyre, Horse Rescue Scotland
Adam Smith, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Tim Baynes, Scottish Land and Estates
Melissa Cradock, The Kennel Club
Ed Hayes, The Kennel Club
John Bruce, British Deer Society
Richard Clare, Cats Protection
Jennifer Terris, Dogs Trust
Eleanor Upstill-Goddard, Dogs Trust
Libby Anderson, OneKind

Apologies

Alison Johnstone MSP
Rona Mackay MSP
Emma Harper MSP
Miles Briggs MSP
Gail Ross MSP
Sue Whittle, Compassion in World Farming
Penny Middleton, NFU Scotland
Dick Morrison, Scottish Kennel Club
Helene Mauchlen, British Horse Society Scotland
Howard Bridges, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home
John Robins, Animal Concern Advice Line
Kevin Flack, International Fund for Animal Welfare
Michael Parks, Animal Plant and Health Agency
Tricia Colville, British Small Animal Veterinary Association
John Burns, World Horse Welfare
Nicolle Hamilton, British Association for Shooting and Conservation

1. Introductions

The Convener (CG) opened the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies

CG intimated apologies as listed above.

3. AGM business

CG notified the Group that, as it had been re-constituted at the start of the new session, it was not relevant to approve the minutes of the previous AGM.

Office bearers were re-elected unopposed as follows:

Convener: Christine Grahame MSP

Deputy Conveners: Colin Smyth MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP (in absentia).

Secretary: Nicolle Hamilton (in absentia).

The Annual Return was approved without amendment.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 18 April 2017 were approved subject to minor corrections.

5. Group discussion

The Convener (CG) asked MSP members about issues they had covered in the current term. Colin Smyth (CS) mentioned the debates on snaring and stink pits, and PQs on electric shock collars for dogs, and said there was still a great deal to do on animal welfare. CG said there were real debates within the SNP on animal welfare issues – for example, her opposition to snaring was well known. Members of the Group were committed to attending debates on animal welfare and raising issues. She noted work done by Alison Johnstone MSP and Gail Ross MSP on CCTV in slaughterhouses. More “push” was required from MSPs, however.

CG explained the process for the tail-docking vote, which was due on 21 June.

CCTV in slaughterhouses: Libby Anderson (LA) informed the Group that following the suggestion at the previous meeting for a parliamentary petition on compulsory CCTV, OneKind and Animal Aid had agreed to support a petition by Alex Campbell (AC) and Kathleen Hamilton. AC said the petition was now drafted and would be published shortly to gather signatures prior to lodging in September. If the petitioners were successful and the law was changed, this would make Scotland the third country in the world, after Israel and France, to make CCTV mandatory. AC acknowledged that many slaughterhouses did have CCTV installed but cameras were not always in the essential areas and vets and welfare officials were not always able to access footage.

CG said she had recently met Ian McWatt, CEO of Food Standards Scotland and that agency was supportive of CCTV installation in slaughterhouses. Mr McWatt had informed her that slaughterhouse operators were more vigilant, and prepared to report their own employees who could have their slaughterman certificates revoked if necessary. The Cabinet Secretary responsible for agricultural animal welfare was setting up a Food Welfare Committee, involving a variety of agencies.

Cat neutering: A Cats Protection campaign on neutering and microchipping, fronted by Mr Smokey (CG's cat) had been launched.

Snaring: LA noted that she had been invited to make a presentation at a later meeting. For the time being she drew attention to the Scottish Natural Heritage report on snaring legislation and the two debates that had recently taken place. CS commented on the anomaly of farmers not being permitted to dispose of carcasses on farm, but gamekeepers were allowed to put wild animals in stink pits. Adam Smith (AS) noted that GWCT guidance had been repeatedly referenced in debates. He said the difference was due to there being a greater risk of disease transmission from livestock, which were kept in greater numbers. CS took the view that the more stringent requirement for checking of snares encouraged greater use of stink pits, as snares were set more densely around these. The Cabinet Secretary for environment had, however, indicated that stink pits would be reviewed. AS maintained that there was no alternative to snaring to protect lambs and biodiversity. He agreed to provide figures on the use of stink pits from GWCT data, and in particular an indication of non-target captures, where there was room for improvement. Harry Huyton (HH) said he welcomed this offer: he was encouraged by public interest in these matters and the fact that the Technical Advisory Group on Snaring (convened by Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture) had been asked to review stink pits. The Cabinet Secretary had also said they would feature in the grouse moor review.

Good Food Nation Bill and farm animal welfare: The Secretary had circulated a draft letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture, requesting inclusion of the highest standards of animal welfare among the central objectives of Scottish Government food and farming policy, and the setting out of core principles on farm animal welfare. Comments had been received from NFU Scotland raising concern about the influx of cheaper imports produced to a lower welfare standard and stressing that the public had to be prepared to pay for high welfare. It was agreed to amend the letter to reflect these comments and it would be re-circulated before sending.

6. Future presentations

Subjects agreed for future presentations included:

Snaring; food standards issues including veterinary support; equine issues including problems with horse passport legislation, identification and welfare obligations, and trotting; rabbit welfare; animal testing (requested by Cruelty Free International); dairy industry practice including removal of calves from their mothers; presentation by Scottish Government on its animal welfare priorities – including proposed licensing of shelters and sanctuaries which could provide a blueprint for licensing other animal establishments. CG asked Peter McDonald (PM) to arrange a presentation on equine issues for the next meeting.

7. Any other business

Ed Hayes (EH) noted the weakness of the Scottish Government's proposal to regulate electric shock collars, and the practical difficulties that implementation would pose. CG said she was completely opposed to these training methods and would aim for a Member's Debate on the issue in the new term.

CG referred to briefings from the Scottish SPCA and others on tail-docking of dogs. She was confident that some SNP members would oppose the new Regulations.

Members were informed that this was Rabbit Awareness Day, and Advocates for Rabbit Welfare were working towards the establishment of a new rescue centre.