

COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS

ANNUAL REPORT 2014





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Design: Ellen Bouma, www.ellenbouma.nl

Production and final editing: [martijndegroot.communicatie](http://martijndegroot.communicatie.nl),
www.martijndegroot.com

Printed by: Xerox/OBT

Cover photo: Buiten-beeld, Wouter Pattyn

Other photos as credited.

www.rda.nl

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The Council on Animal Affairs: purpose and activities

The Council on Animal Affairs (Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden RDA) is an independent panel of experts which advises the Minister of Economic Affairs about animal health and welfare and related matters. It provides its advice both on request and as it considers necessary. The Council has approximately forty members representing varied backgrounds and areas of expertise. All act in a personal capacity without obligation of compulsion.

The Council on Animal Affairs considers all aspects of animal policy and all categories of animal: captive ('domesticated') and non-captive ('wild') animals, smallholding animals, companion animals (pets), and farm and laboratory animals.

The Council presents the results of its deliberations in the form of an 'Opinion' which includes an account of the scientific and societal background to the topic under consideration together with non-binding recommendations for solutions or policy. The Council does not necessarily seek consensus: an Opinion may include minority standpoints.

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Foreword

Animal welfare is a topic which now attracts growing public interest and concern. This is amply illustrated by the discussions about the 'approved list' of companion animals, the conservation status of wild species such as the Eurasian eagle owl, the European wolf and wild boar, the use of antibiotics in meat production and the desirability of large-scale livestock production.

The Council on Animal Affairs sees a concomitant increase in the demand for balanced, consistent Opinions which take account of all the various interests and perspectives that inform the discussions.

Partly due to a number of personnel changes, 2014 was a year of review and reorientation for the Council. It was also a year in which various new initiatives were launched, the results of which will soon become apparent. We shall continue to pursue consistency in our advice, opinions and reports. At the same time, we shall broaden our horizons, ensuring full transparency and increasing our outreach. We shall become more proactive in communicating our findings. This Annual Report provides an account of our policy and activities in this area. We hope to present the initial results in next year's edition.

Frauke Ohl

Prof. Frauke Ohl
Chair, Council on Animal Affairs



Photo: William Hoogteyling

‘The Council’s advice is most valuable when it is allowed to define its own role and activities’

‘There are certain fundamental questions which should be asked and answered,’ states Sharon Dijksma. As the Minister for Agriculture at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, she is the person to whom the Council on Animal Affairs addresses its Opinions. ‘Within society as a whole, there are many perspectives from which animal health and welfare can be viewed. The Council should take all interests into account during its deliberations.’

‘There are certain fundamental questions which should be asked and answered,’ states Sharon Dijksma. As the Minister for Agriculture at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, she is the person to whom the Council on Animal Affairs addresses its Opinions. ‘Within society as a whole, there are many perspectives from which animal health and welfare can be viewed. The Council should take all interests into account during its deliberations.’

‘Many of the Council’s Opinions have had a direct influence on government

We have received many Opinions which we are now using to support various policy processes’

policy. This applies to Grip op Ingrepen (on the acceptability of procedures such as castration, tail-docking and bill-trimming) and to Verantwoord Houden

Houden (on responsible dog ownership). The Council has also advised on the proposed cull of wild geese and suggested a protocol for dealing with beached whales and other marine mammals. These Opinions could be directly implemented within policy. Others are at a somewhat higher level of abstraction. They cannot be adopted ‘as is’ but they do inform policy. Inevitably, there are a very few occasions on which part of an Opinion fails to move matters forward and must be disregarded. The political reality is that not everything that is possible is desirable, and not everything that is desirable is possible.’

Do you inform the Council when you find an Opinion less than helpful?

‘Yes, absolutely. I regard the Council as a friend and ally. We can be open with each

other. I’m sure members realise that not everything they suggest is viable. Looking back over my time in office, however, I would say that the Council’s Opinions have played a very prominent part in shaping my policy.’

In recent years, the Council has applied a structured methodology – an ‘analysis framework’ – when producing Opinions that it knows will support policy decisions. This reflects a desire to find an appropriate approach to problems rather than cut-and-dried solutions. Do you approve?

‘It depends on the issue. If we’re talking about beached whales, a quick response is vital. The Opinion must reflect this urgency. In other cases, the analysis framework is a valid approach because the exact circumstances under which



Photo: Nationale Beeldbank

a decision will be made are not yet known. But I believe the most important thing is for the Council to decide how it is to operate. Its Opinions will be of greatest value when is allowed to define its own role and activities.'

Last year, the Council was asked to produce an Opinion on the preconditions for responsible pet ownership. In essence, the conclusion was that it is too early to say: the Council requires more information and better information. What was your response?

'The discussion about 'approved lists' of animals which may be kept as pets has been ongoing for some twenty years. Our aim has been to make small, measured steps towards the desired situation. It is then irksome to experience obstacles on the way. However, it is better to be able to address any issues as they arise, and we have done so by inviting

various stakeholders to join us in reassessing the animals to be included on the lists and the relevant conditions for responsible ownership. The process is ongoing and I am satisfied with progress. I would be far more concerned if we had been told that the process was less than responsible for some reason, and had done absolutely nothing about it. There are many people who object to the idea of an 'approved list', so there should be room for constructive criticism. If it helps us to prepare to take firm steps in future, the Council's decision to refrain from offering an Opinion at this time was wholly justified.'

Not all Opinions are produced at the request of the ministry. Some deliberations are initiated by the Council itself. Recent examples include Winstgevend Welzijn (on animal welfare in the commercial livestock sector) and

Zorgplicht Natuurlijk Gewogen (which considers society's moral responsibility for the health and welfare of wild animals). Do you attach importance to these unsolicited Opinions? Do you look forward to receiving more of this type of report?

'Keep them coming! This is why the Council exists. It has done an enormous amount of good work in recent years and we have been able to make good use of its advice in several areas. The Council's Opinion on physical modifications to animals (*Grip op Ingrepen*) provided direct input for policy and proved very useful in our negotiations with the field parties. It enabled us to arrive at mutually acceptable agreements about procedures such as the castration of piglets. The Opinion on wild and semi-domestic animal welfare was also very useful and supported our policy discussions about the so-called large herbivores: deer, wild ponies and

roaming cattle. The Council acted as a sort of process manager during the discussions about the 'approved list', and to good effect. If the Council wishes to assume a similar role in future social discussions about animal welfare, or would like to contribute its strategic analyses to support policy development, I shall have no objections. Nevertheless, I think it will be appropriate to define the Council's role on a case-by-case basis. The Council and its chair have acquired a certain authority. From time to

'When a whale is stranded on the beach, immediate action is essential. We need straightforward instructions, not an in-depth policy report'

time it will be useful to call upon them as independent third parties, able to contribute new perspectives



Photo: Dierenbeeldbank



Photo: Nationale Beeldbank



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Marc Schakenraad

Photo: Roel Rozenburg

Marc Schakenraad, the new secretary of the Council:

‘It is now time for expansion and outreach’

‘The past year has been one of review and planning, of looking back and looking forward. We also developed a number of new initiatives and perspectives,’ states Council secretary Marc Schakenraad. ‘We must follow through to arrive at the best possible results, and we must increase the visibility of our Opinions. In other words, we must expand our activities and achieve greater outreach.’

‘The past year has been one of review and planning, of looking back and looking forward. We also developed a number of new initiatives and perspectives,’ states Council secretary Marc Schakenraad. ‘We must follow through to arrive at the best possible results, and we must increase the visibility of our Opinions. In other words, we must expand our activities and achieve greater outreach.’

The members of the Council on Animal Affairs are experts in their respective fields. All are committed to promoting animal welfare. Their combined knowledge covers an extremely broad spectrum. ‘Even broader than I had imagined,’ Marc Schakenraad discovered when he took up his appointment in October 2014. ‘An outsider may think that such diversity would lead to confusion, but nothing could be further from the truth. The contributions from so many disciplines and viewpoints result in better, more astute insights and provide a sound evidence base for the Council’s Opinions.’

A firm foundation has been laid, Schakenraad asserts. It is now time to make the Council and its work

more visible. ‘If we wish to develop further in our role, we must ensure that society knows that we are here and acknowledges our expertise.’

‘My predecessor, Laurens Hoedemaker, stepped down in 2014. There were various personnel changes in the RDA support office. A member of the Council, Alex Ploeg, was among the victims of the MH17 air disaster (see p. 22). These developments demanded a period of

M.H.W. (Marc) Schakenraad was appointed secretary of the Council on Animal Affairs on 1 October 2014. He graduated in veterinary science from the University of Wageningen and spent three years with its LEI research institute before joining the staff of the (then) Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (FNV) in 1994 as a policy advisor. He went on to fill senior appointments in various divisions, most recently the Animal Supply Chain and Animal Welfare Department.

adjustment but we resumed activities with renewed vigour in the latter half of the year. At the Council meeting in November it was very clear that members were keen to tackle new topics. Everyone had an opportunity to speak, various new ideas were proposed, and many members volunteered to contribute to forthcoming Opinions.'

Four new topics were selected: dairy farming, the relationship between veterinary and human health, feral cats, and the position of animals within the government's nature conservation policy. Marc Schakenraad has been impressed by the transparency of the Council's work and procedures. 'Everyone can take part in a forum, and the forum itself can co-opt external parties to provide any additional expertise required.' The interim products of the forums, including the draft Opinions, are discussed by the full Council. Every Opinion is therefore a product of the Council as a whole. 'It is important to follow a consistent line,' stresses Schakenraad. 'In this respect, we must continue to build upon the progress achieved in recent years.'

Marc Schakenraad now wishes to raise the profile of the Council and its products. 'We must do more to publicise our activities. I think we have already made some significant steps in the right direction. We now present our results more effectively. Last year, we published an accessible and attractive Annual Report. This interview will appear in the second edition which I hope will reach an even wider readership. We recently updated our website and we also produced two 'popular' versions of our Opinions. I hope that there will be many more to follow. It is important that our views and recommendations can be read – and more importantly, understood – by the general public. I am confident that our new Council member Bas Haring will be able to help here. He is renowned for his ability to explain complex ideas in simple terms.'

Alongside further improvements to the website, Marc Schakenraad wishes to establish new channels of communication with the various target groups. Stakeholder meetings and brainstorming sessions are among the ideas under consideration. But, he stresses, everything must be carefully planned to ensure the necessary cohesion. 'We must not rush into things. We are now working on a communication plan which will ensure that our resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.'

The new initiatives developed by the Council will make a significant contribution to the public debate in

the years ahead, Schakenraad believes. 'Animal welfare is very much a 'hot topic', as illustrated by the recent discussions about the 'approved' lists, the Eurasian eagle owl, wolf sightings, wild boar, use of antibiotics, battery livestock farming and so forth. An increasing number of people are becoming involved in these discussions. The Council on Animal Affairs meets a clear societal need. Its thorough, impartial recommendations take account of the various interests and perspectives, and therefore help to form policy in a manner befitting a democratic society.'



Photo: De Beeldkuil



Photo: Roel Rozenburg

The first Vaarkamp Lecture

‘Caring for animals: everyone’s responsibility?’

The Council on Animal Affairs organises an annual lecture named in honour of its first chairman, Prof. Henk Vaarkamp, who died in 2011. The inaugural Vaarkamp Lecture was given on 7 February 2014 by Prof. Anton Pijpers, Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University, who addressed a capacity audience in St Martin’s Cathedral, Utrecht. Here we present a summary.

“There are 97 million chickens, 12.5 million pigs, 4.4 million cats and dogs, and almost 3.9 million head of cattle in the Netherlands. The way in which we care for all these animals is a topic of ongoing discussion. Farm animals kept for non-commercial purposes – as household pets for example – are increasingly seen as ‘a member of the family’. The relationship between the professional and his animals, on the other hand, is becoming ever more ‘businesslike’. There is a sharp contrast in approach.

In Europe, we have established that all animals have an intrinsic worth and must be protected. In 2013, the Netherlands enacted legislation to this effect [the *Wet Dieren* or ‘Animals Act’] while the concept of a ‘duty of care’ towards animals also applies. This entails respecting Brambell’s ‘Five Freedoms’, which relate to the aspects of animal welfare under human control. They are currently expressed as: a) Freedom from hunger or thirst; b) Freedom from discomfort; c) Freedom from pain, injury or disease; d) Freedom to express (most) normal behaviour, and e) Freedom from fear and distress.

At the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, we like to define a state of well-being in which the animal is able to adapt to its surroundings and living conditions, and can therefore achieve a status which it experiences as positive.

The government’s 2012 policy memorandum on Animal Welfare and Animal Health states that every ‘keeper’, a term which refers to a person responsible for one or more animals, must care for those animals in a ‘socially accepted manner’, and must of course comply with all legislative requirements. Exactly what this means in terms of production animals – livestock – has been open to significant debate. For several decades, the Dutch livestock sector has sought advantages of scale in order to reduce costs and increase profits. It has been successful in doing so, and has also established an excellent export position, contributing some 25 billion euros a year to the national economy. This is why we are now conducting a public debate about extremely large livestock operations. In essence the question is, ‘do we want them in our country? Opinions are sharply divided.

Concerns

There are also marked contrasts in attitude. Alongside respect for productivity and efficiency, we also see an adherence to tradition, ‘naturalness’ and anthropomorphic thinking. Many people have major concerns about intensive farming practices and the potential effects in terms of animal welfare, public health, the quality of the human environment and social cohesion within local communities. They are not willing to accept risks such as infection with the campylobacter bacterium, which is actually very common in poultry.



Photo: De Beeldkuil

Rens van Dobbenburgh:

‘The bridge between society and the livestock sector is an important theme’

‘Henk Vaarkamp was a remarkable man who made major contributions to both veterinary medicine and animal welfare. He was a man of ideas who brought people together and made things happen. Following Vaarkamp’s untimely death in 2011, the Minister for Agriculture suggested that he should be given a fitting memorial. Everyone who had known Henk Vaarkamp agreed.’

Rens van Dobbenburgh certainly knew Prof. Vaarkamp well, having worked in the same veterinary practice in Diessen. He was also Vaarkamp’s successor as Veterinary Director of the pharmaceutical cooperative AUV. Today, Van Dobbenburgh is the Chief Veterinary Officer of Henry Schein Animal Health Europe, which acquired AUV in 2012. He was among the group who acted on the minister’s suggestion of a permanent memorial. They decided that an annual lecture series named after the late chairman would be a fitting tribute. It would focus on the social and societal acceptance of livestock farming. ‘This was perhaps the most obvious topic, since intensive livestock production does have a significant image problem,’ Van Dobbenburgh explains.

The day of the first lecture went extremely well. Although largely organised by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Council on Animal Affairs and its (then)

secretary Laurens Hoedemaker deserve an honourable mention. ‘The event was attended by some four hundred people. The main speaker, Prof. Anton Pijpers, gave a most engaging talk. Of course, a lecture like this cannot resolve all issues in one fell swoop but it can help to engender mutual understanding between society and the livestock sector. That is certain necessary in today’s climate. You must explain the economic reality of production farming, but you also have to listen to what the general public thinks. Both elements were brought together in Prof. Pijpers’ lecture. The general message was that if everyone makes just a small step forwards, the combined effect will be huge. Anton Pijpers gave a comprehensive account of all the various aspects of human and animal interaction, from pets and companion animals, via working animals to production livestock: animals which are specifically bred

for consumption. He considered the role of all stakeholders and their various interests and perspectives. How do they regard keeping animals which will be killed and eaten? Lastly, he examined the position of his own profession – veterinary medicine – which is now seeing its independence being eroded.’

It is useful to talk about the relationship between society and the livestock industry, Van Dobbenburgh believes. He hopes that it will continue to be the main theme of future Vaarkamp lectures. ‘The world population is growing rapidly. The big question is how we are to produce enough food for everyone. Animal health is an important consideration. There are already some 1.8 billion people who are dependent on the health of their animals, which is often worst in the very countries where it matters most. That is something to which we must all devote attention in future.’

To ensure long-term economic survival, and to assuage public concern, the agricultural sector must opt for sustainability in all its forms. The private sector and the government share a common ambition: by 2020, Dutch supply chains for meat, dairy produce and eggs must include only safe, healthy, high-quality products. Production methods must enjoy social approval, and they must devote due attention to animal welfare. This goes beyond the strict letter of the law. It demands a very high level of animal health, which in turn demands the prevention, monitoring and control of infectious veterinary diseases. The government sees vaccination as an important, alongside a differentiated policy in which the measures and requirements for commercial livestock differ from those which apply to pets and (semi-) domesticated animals. Importers and transport companies have significant responsibility in terms of prevention. An effective approach requires a cohesive pan-European veterinary health infrastructure. But the most important factors in the effective prevention of disease remain good management and expert knowledge. Precisely the same applies to the non-professional animal keeper, but it is clear that not everyone possesses the required knowledge. We often see animals which are overweight or obese because they have been improperly fed, kept in inappropriate conditions or not allowed sufficient exercise. In the past, the Council on Animal Affairs suggested that basic animal care should be included in the school curriculum. I agree.

Achievement

Antibiotics are of great importance to both animal and human health. It is now essential to safeguard against antimicrobial resistance. In recent years, the joint efforts of the livestock sector, the government and the Royal Netherlands Society for Veterinary Medicine (KNMvD) have brought about a fifty per cent reduction in the use of antibiotics: a commendable achievement.



Photos: Roel Rozenburg

Clockwise from top left: Prof. Anton Pijpers, Minister Sharon Dijkstra opens the meeting, Council Chair Prof. Frauke Ohl welcomes the guests, Prof. Pijpers, family of Prof. Vaarkamp in conversation with the minister.

The government establishes frameworks. It facilitates and protects. However, it does not have sole responsibility: others have a part to play. Retailers, for example, could opt to stock only products which pass all tests of social acceptability. NGOs can place issues on the social agenda and actively promote their discussion. The veterinary profession has a twofold responsibility: to animals and to society. If we are to meet our responsibilities, veterinarians must enjoy a strong and independent position. In recent years, that position appears to be eroded by commercial interests, increasing scale and

competition. Nevertheless, the role of the profession is of growing importance, not least in terms of public health because some seventy per cent of new diseases are zoonotic, transmitted from animals to humans. A few years ago, the Council on Animal Affairs called for system changes to promote professional conduct, safeguard the public interests and reduce the likelihood of any conflict of interests. A system of animal health certification has also been proposed. The general public has an important role to play in promoting animal health and welfare. It is a joint social responsibility.”

Veterinary student Nils Bekkedam: 'Vets must make things absolutely clear'

'Many factors influence animal welfare, especially in the livestock sector. There is a complex interplay of economic and societal interests, animal health and environmental considerations. Surely the vet is the person best placed to appreciate all factors and present them to society in a balanced manner,' says Nils Bekkedam, a student of veterinary medicine who attended the first Vaarkamp Lecture.

'I never met Prof. Vaarkamp but having listened to the lecture, I have a good idea of what he stood for and what he wanted to achieve. One of the many topics covered by Prof. Pijpers was the use of antibiotics in the livestock sector. It has courted much criticism but it is not a black-and-white issue.

As Bekkedam sees it, a key message of this first Vaarkamp lecture is that veterinarians can and should do more to inform and educate the public. 'Consumers may state a preference for ethically produced, 'animal-friendly' meat,

but they want to pay low prices. So they don't buy it and we come no closer to a solution. The veterinary sector can and should provide public information on matters like this. They know a lot about what is happening. They must now connect with society at large and take responsibility for communication. Vets must make things absolutely clear.'

'I now have a good idea of what Prof. Vaarkamp stood for.'

Photo: De Beeldkuil



Responsible animal ownership

Council Opinion requested by government

It is over twenty-five years since the idea of an ‘approved’ list was mooted. Such a list would set out the species which it is considered socially acceptable to keep as pets, companions or ‘backyard livestock’, and would establish conditions to ensure the welfare of the animals themselves and to preclude risks to humans.

In 2009, the Council on Animal Affairs published the Opinion *Verantwoord Houden* (‘Responsible Ownership’), which examines the duty of care which falls to anyone who keeps animals. This document formed the basis for the most recent Opinion, which focuses on the conditions and requirements that should be imposed. In June 2013, the minister presented the first ‘approved lists’, which are restricted to mammals. They are partly based on a system developed by the Animal Sciences Group at Wageningen University and Research Centre to assess the degree to which an animal’s welfare is affected by being held in captivity. The lists also take into account factors such as the risk of zoonoses, risks to the environment or local communities, and the risks associated with species invasions into the wild.

Societal support

In July 2013, the minister requested the Council to submit an Opinion in which the conditions under which certain species may be kept are defined. These species would then form the ‘Approved subject to conditions’ list. The conditions themselves must of course be realistic and practicable, and must enjoy adequate public support. The Council was asked to consult the relevant stakeholder

organisations. In response to a parliamentary motion, the minister later requested the Council to examine the proposed requirements for the accommodation and care of the six mammal species already on the ‘approved’ list. The Council determined that support for the original proposals was not particularly high, and that input from the stakeholder organisations would certainly be required in order to arrive at definitive regulations because the Wageningen database did not contain adequate information on a number of species. The Council then organised a meeting with the stakeholder groups with a view to formulating some basic principles on which all could

agree. The meeting was attended by around fifty people, representing thirty different organisations. All agreed that the practice of keeping animals should indeed be subject to rules and conditions. However, many also expressed doubts that the proposed ‘approved list’ system could be effectively enforced.

In many cases, organisations which felt that they had not been adequately consulted in the past saw the proposed arrangements as lacking in transparency. One criticism related to the duplication between the ‘approved lists’ and existing legislation, particularly in terms of risks, zoonoses and invasiveness. The arguments with



Photo: Dierenbeeldbank

regard to veterinary diseases and zoonoses were regarded as somewhat unrealistic, and there was considerable criticism of the inclusion of dogs and cats on the list of 'production animals' which meant that they were not subject to assessment by Wageningen University.

Clarity

The Council then set about producing a framework which would create coherence between the conditions and requirements for all species, regardless of the purpose for which they are kept. This went beyond the terms of reference of the minister's original request but was considered necessary in the interests of consistent and sustainable policy.

This process revealed that the considerations applied when assigning a species to a particular list were lacking in clarity. This undermined general support for the approved lists system itself. Another factor which undermined support was the decision to exclude cats and dogs from the assessment by placing them on the 'production animals' list, a decision which the Council also called into question. Lastly, the Council was alert to any duplication with other legislation and guidelines, both existing and planned.

The Council decided to complete the advisory process in two phases. First there would be an interim report examining the form and content of new regulations, followed in the first half of 2014 by the final Opinion setting out the regulations themselves. The input of stakeholder groups would be essential during the second phase.

Because it was felt that the greatest potential for problems exists among amateur, inexperienced animal keepers, a system of licensing and registration was proposed whereby prospective animal owners would have to satisfy certain criteria. The stakeholder groups indicated their desire and willingness to be involved in administering

this system. It was proposed that the trade in companion animals should be subject to voluntary certification, with the number of points of sale for specialist species restricted, and mandatory information provided to purchasers in the form of printed care instructions.

Regulations and requirements

The Council regards prescriptive, objective-based measures as more effective and hence preferable to proscriptive regulations. It further calls for measures which will promote positive elements (based on best practices) rather than those which will merely obviate negative elements. A template for 'care instructions for owners' was devised, the details of which can be completed by the relevant breed associations.

The Council recommends that regulations or instructions that have been devised in this way should then be subject to evaluation by an independent expert commission, to be appointed by the minister. This commission would also be required to assess any subsequent amendments.

The existing national knowledge and information centres have a role to play in disseminating and publicising the new requirements. The *Landelijk Informatiecentrum Gezelschapsdieren* provides information about keeping pets and companion animals, while the *Landelijk Kennisnetwerk Levende Have* fulfils a similar role in respect of farmyard and park animals.

Other recommendations

The Council's Opinions include a number of further recommendations:

- Communication and cooperation between animal owners' associations, NGOs working in animal welfare and the government should be encouraged.
- The regulations and requirements for animal ownership should be based on an open system to facilitate

subsequent amendments based on new knowledge or insights.

- Care instructions should be produced for all species, including those for which there are no ownership restrictions.
- Cross-breeds, mixed breeds and hybrids must be included within the regulations for the relevant (dominant) species.
- The findings of the European CALLISTO project should be used to refine national policy on the transmission of diseases from companion animals to humans or production animals.

Final report

In December 2013, the minister issued a response to the interim report in which she stated the intention of including only minimum requirements in the legislation to resolve problems and provide the necessary degree of protection. Best practices to promote animal welfare would not be incorporated at this time, since this purpose can be better served by the dissemination of knowledge by the expert groups on a voluntary basis. It later proved impossible to compile a list of potential problems to be addressed by the minimum requirements, there being insufficient scientific evidence. The Council warned that this situation would seriously undermine both general support and the sustainability of such a list, informing the minister as follows: 'Based on the information currently available, the Council does not have adequate knowledge of the actual or potential problems which can or should be addressed by subjecting the ownership of certain mammal species to legislative requirements. Accordingly, the Council is unable to propose the form or content of such requirements at this time, believing that this would not be in keeping with its responsibilities as an independent advisory body.'

Forum chair Ludo Hellebrekers: 'Gradually working towards a good result'

The first part of the Council's Opinion on the criteria for responsible ownership of animals (Onder voorwaarden houden) was published in December 2013. It was an interim report, as the Council explained at the time. The second and final part was published in April 2014 and concluded that there was insufficient information on which to base a full Opinion stating the conditions which should apply to keeping various animal species.

The report was intended to lay the foundation for the 'approved lists' of species which may be kept and the requirements that must be observed when doing so. However, the



Photo: William Hoogteyling

Council determined that it would be impossible to lay that foundation without a firm evidence base. It was first necessary to clarify the level of detail required, as well as who was responsible for establishing the regulations who should then enforce them. The second part of the Council's Opinion, in the form of a relatively short letter to the minister, confirmed this standpoint because the Council had determined that the necessary scientific knowledge was not available, and was unlikely to become available within the foreseeable future. This was a new experience for both the Council and those who were awaiting its findings.. 'It was the first time we have been unable to deliver the requested product,' says Ludo Hellebrekers, the chair of the forum convened to produce the Opinion. 'But we had no choice. Our hands were tied.'

Following the production of the first part of the Opinion, Wageningen University and Research Centre had indeed produced a list of the species concerned but, as Hellebrekers explains, 'it failed to identify the real issues. We had asked for hard scientific evidence which had been reviewed by external experts,

which we would then combine with practical knowledge contributed by the stakeholder organisations: the people who have experience in breeding and keeping these animals. As we made clear in the second part of the report, it was essential to have both forms of input. Everyone was disappointed that the original terms of reference could not be met. Nevertheless, we can state that the process has had the intended effect. Work is now very much in hand to arrive at firm conditions and requirements, based on good scientific evidence, which are both practical and enforceable. The results thus far are very encouraging. The ministry took responsibility for the process, Wageningen University became responsible for its implementation.'

Hellebrekers is also closely involved in the process in his capacity of professor of veterinary medicine at Utrecht University. 'We needed clear and incontrovertible evidence from the scientific field, and we also needed more input from the stakeholders. Arrangements were put in place whereby we could obtain both.' Later in the year, an expert group was assembled to start work on the final

'approved lists.' It includes representatives of the research field, stakeholder organisations and advocacy groups such as the AAP Foundation, all working alongside each other to formulate rules and requirements for each of the various animal species. Their recommendations will then go before an advisory committee made up of four independent experts and the Wageningen programme director, Hans Hopster. The advisory committee will assess the quality, practicality and coherence of the proposed measures, taking into account further input such as the NVWA risk assessment for zoonoses. Everyone is extremely committed to the process, states Prof. Hellebrekers who also chairs the advisory committee. He cites a meeting of the expert group held in December 2014. The members continued their discussions until 1.30 am in order to meet their deadline. But such efforts have paid dividends. 'By this time, we had a firm grasp on the process. Even before the year was out, we could deliver the first batch of recommendations relating to 120 different animals to the ministry. The list is divided into three categories: animals which may be kept without any special restrictions or requirements, those which may be kept provided conditions are observed, and those which may not be kept at all.' This 'approved list' came into effect on 1 February 2015. Ludo Hellebrekers now looks back on the entire process with great satisfaction. Eventually, the various parties, each with their own responsibilities, found common ground and could bring everything to a most successful conclusion.'

Policy director Henri Kool (EZ): 'We are pleased that a transparent method has been introduced'

'It has been something of a struggle to arrive at an effective system of 'approved lists' for domestic animals. However, the process was greatly facilitated by the Council's advice and recommendations,' says Henri Kool, head of the Animal Supply Chain and Animal Welfare Department at the Ministry of Economic Affairs.



Photo: Wiebe Kiestra

'The approved pets lists represent entirely original policy,' Kool states. 'There is nothing comparable in other countries for us to copy.' Designing the system was a complex undertaking, as was the production of the Council's advisory report. The Council's initial conclusion was there was not enough information to support the requested opinion. 'It seemed that we would have to admit defeat, albeit for

good reason. We accepted that unsubstantiated advice would help no one.' Nevertheless, the process did have certain benefits. As Henri Kool points out, it revealed the high level of engagement among the stakeholders. 'We had been working on the approved lists for some time, but the results failed to win the support of the stakeholder organisations. They often felt that they had not been adequately consulted.' During the latter half of 2014, efforts to produce lists based on firm evidence continued, with much input from researchers and experts. These efforts were successful and the first official 'approved' lists came into effect on 1 February 2015. 'The stakeholders had a far more prominent role in this part of the process. The joint approach helped to foster the necessary support, even though the results were not always what individual stakeholders had hoped. We are gratified that we now have a transparent method which has evolved to become highly effective. We shall now attempt to complete the approved lists of mammals. The experience we gain in doing so will be valuable if we then decide to apply the same method to other types of animal.'

Ferret keeper Ed Beijer: 'Regulations are in the animals' interest, provided they are in line with the latest knowledge'

Ed Beijer is a committee member of the Netherlands' ferret-keepers' association. He looks back on the production of the first approved lists with mixed feelings. He has nothing but praise for the original advisory report *Onder Voorwaarden Houden van Dieren*, which played an important part in the process. He also welcomes the lists themselves. 'We are very much in favour of there being regulations which govern how people keep all pets and animals, including ferrets. This is in the best interests of the animals themselves, since there are many owners who do not know all they should about the special character of the ferret and how this affects

its care.' Beijer explains that the ferret is the domesticated form of the European polecat, *Mustela putorius*. Like its wild cousin, it is a solitary animal which is not accustomed to living alongside other ferrets. 'We stress that the lists and regulations must not be static documents. It is essential that they can be updated in line with new knowledge and insights, and those insights should come mainly from us, the expert keepers.' One of the criticisms raised during the stakeholders' meeting held in September 2013 was that the government had not done enough to tap the practical knowledge and experience of people 'in the field': those who actually keep the animals under consideration. The Council took note and agreed that the knowledge available at that time was insufficient to form the basis of effective guidelines.

Beijer and his association welcomed the finding. 'The final report was good,' he states. Efforts to gather the necessary knowledge were then stepped up, with the first approved lists as the result. 'Again, I welcome the regulations but at the same time I think it is a great shame that keeping a ferret is still subject to legal restrictions. It is a fully domesticated animal which does not occur in the wild. It should therefore be in the same category as, say, rabbits or guinea pigs. Moreover, the style of the new guidelines is rather formal. They should be rewritten in clearer language.'



Photo: Wiebe Kiestra

Laurens Hoedemaker, former Secretary of the Council, now director of the Royal Dutch Hunters Association:

‘The Council should act as more of a sparring partner’



Photo: William Hoogteyling

Laurens Hoedemaker

‘The Council on Animal Affairs is both useful and essential,’ asserts Laurens Hoedemaker. Until mid-2014 he was secretary of the Council, a post he had held since 2007. His decision to make a career move has not changed his opinion of the Council. On the contrary: in his new role as director of the Royal Dutch Hunters Association (KNJV), he sees the Council as being ‘an important bridge between policy on nature and that on kept animals’. The two domains often appear to clash.

Much of the nature in our country is man-made or at least man-managed. There is no clear dividing line between nature and agriculture, but rather a gradual transition. In terms of our responsibilities towards all animals, the Council’s advisory report *Zorgplicht Natuurlijk Gewogen* offers a good basis on which to connect the two usages. The Council should do more to encourage this way of thinking, perhaps by becoming more of a sparring partner to the government.’

Hoedemaker’s departure was not the only notable personnel development in 2014. Although his replacement, Marc Schakenraad, was appointed relatively quickly, the secretariat suffered from severe under-staffing throughout much of the year. There were also changes to the membership of the Council itself. Meanwhile, the requested Opinion on responsible animal ownership, the first part of which had been published in December

2013, demanded much attention. There were frequent meetings between Council representatives, the Ministry of Economic Affairs as commissioning client, stakeholder organisations and Wageningen University, which had been asked to provide the necessary scientific evidence base. The process continued even after the publication of the second part of the report in April 2014, the aim being to arrive at a set of conditions and regulations to ensure responsible animal ownership (see also pp. 12-15).

A platform of expertise

With the benefit of hindsight we can state that circumstances warranted a partial reorganisation. The Council had already undergone something of a metamorphosis. ‘We had established a very clear line, beginning with the weighty 2009 report *Verantwoord Houden* which examined the division of responsibilities for animal

health and welfare in our country. A year later we produced the Agenda for Animal Policy, which made the first call for a formal assessment framework. This idea permeated various subsequent reports, including those on physical modifications and the first part of *Onder Voorwaarden Houden*.

Hoedemaker believes that this progression helped to crystallise the new role of the Council. No longer was it a discussion forum for those advocating special interests, but a true 'platform' bringing together various forms of expertise. 'Rather than exchanging views and opinions, members began to share and compare hard knowledge. And rather than attempting to defend solutions, they began to focus on finding effective approaches.' Other developments that helped change the nature of the Council's work included the introduction of short 'abridged' Opinions and adherence to the principle that all members should be entirely independent and not answerable to any other organisation.

An Opinion on hunting

Laurens Hoedemaker still regards the 2009 report *Verantwoord Houden* and the later document on responsibility for wildlife (*Zorgplicht Natuurlijk Gewogen*) as milestones in the Council's development. 'If you combine the two, you have a sort of users' manual which sets out our responsibilities towards all animals. That could be a valuable successor to the Brambell Report of 1965, the document which presented the 'five freedoms' and continues to form the basis of thinking on animal welfare.' Isn't that rather ambitious, we ask. 'Perhaps, but not beyond the realms of possibility. The European Forum for Animal Welfare Councils (EuroFAWC) has discussed the idea on more than one occasion and the climate appears to be favourable.'



Photo: Buiten-beeld, Dick Pasman

As director of the Royal Dutch Hunters Association, Hoedemaker would welcome a Council opinion on hunting. It is a thorny issue on which public opinion is sharply divided. 'That is precisely why it would be so useful for the Council to make a statement. I know that wisdom

and expertise are the hallmarks of all Council activities, so I have every confidence in its findings.'

The new members of the Council



Marketing expert Hans van Trijp: 'Include economic considerations in the discussion'

At time of writing, Hans van Trijp is looking forward to attending his first full Council meeting. He considers the Council's broad horizon to be one of its key strengths, although his own contribution will inevitably focus on the economic reality of the market. He is, after all, professor of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Wageningen University.

The Council is asked to consider extremely diverse issues, Van Trijp notes, and must therefore draw upon various disciplines and perspectives. This is why he finds the work so interesting. There are of course some topics about which he is not quite so passionate. 'Mink farming, for example, is less important to me than the dairy or pig-farming sectors. Every supermarket stocks dairy and pork products, so the marketing aspects are more prominent. This is where my expertise lies. If you want to change something, to promote animal welfare for example, you have to get the consumer on your side. There is a trade-off between animal welfare on the one hand and price on the other. Many people say that they want to improve animal welfare or are willing to eat less meat. But very few actually do so, and few are willing to pay extra.

They expect meat products to be cheap with no concessions in terms of convenience or flavour. They are unwilling to make any significant changes to their eating habits.'

The ethical perspective dominates many of the Council's discussions and Van Trijp hopes to be able to cast light on such aspects of consumer behaviour for the benefit of his colleagues. 'I do not intend to preach, but I do think it is important for the economic aspects to be included in the discussion. Legislation must be framed and presented in a way which maximises its impact by encouraging people to make different choices. This is important not only for consumers but also for the farmers, for all links in the supply chain, and of course for the animals themselves



Photo: Wiebe Kiestra

Animal ecologist Jacques van Alphen: 'First we dissect the problem'

'The Council on Animal Affairs is a sort of development laboratory in which we seek solutions to problems at the intersection of biology and sociology,' replies Jacques van Alphen when asked what he finds most appealing about the advisory body and its work. Since his appointment, he has attended one full Council meeting and several forum meetings.

'The solutions are rarely cut and dried', comments the emeritus professor of animal ecology. 'There are many different ways of approaching a problem and you must choose the path which is most likely to lead to a satisfactory outcome, although you will rarely know in advance exactly what that outcome will be. It is a fascinating process, not least because the issues we consider are complex and socially relevant. One Council forum is currently examining whether the conditions for keeping domestic animals can and should be extended to cover semi-domesticated or even wild animals. What is our moral responsibility? This is the most challenging problem I have encountered thus far. There have been several reported sightings of the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) in the south of our country, for example. This is a protected species and its population is threatened by invasions of feral domestic cats, either through cross-breeding, food competition or the transmission of disease. This is why we should prevent any proliferation of feral cats. But how? An aspect which is new to me as a biologist is that we consider the welfare of individual animals. In my profession, we are generally concerned with the

entire species or a population. If the population is thriving, we tend to assume that so are all its individual members.' The Council adopts a particularly thorough approach, which is one reason that Prof. van Alphen is pleased to be involved in its work. 'The methodology is very strong. First, we dissect the problem to identify the ethical aspects. This is like taking a step back in order to get a better 'run up'. Next, we arrive at an approach with which we can analyse the problem based on all the relevant perspectives. The Council members represent virtually all disciplines. They include biologists, ecologists, lawyers, people who are involved in both research and practice. This is useful because the issues generally have a marked political or social background.' Van Alphen is confident that the Council will be called upon to consider many more important issues. 'Questions concerning man's relationship with animals are raised with astonishing regularity. We have now established a framework with which we can approach those questions systematically and methodically. It is no longer a case of giving ad hoc answers to ad hoc questions.'



Consultant Han Swinkels: 'Social impact is important'

Han Swinkels is a relatively new member of the Council on Animal Affairs. He has now attended two full meetings. He sees the main role of the Council as 'adding value to the social debate'. In his professional life, Swinkels works to increase social acceptance of the livestock sector. In addition to his work as a consultant, he is senior lecturer in Sustainable Livestock Chains at HAS University of Applied Sciences. Han Swinkels considers it important that the Council is able to examine all themes in appropriate depth, and to do so entirely independently. 'We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by passing fads or trends,' he asserts.'

It is good that an independent advisory body exists as part of the political system, believes Swinkel. He stresses that he is eager to make his contribution. The Council's approach demonstrates a desire to avoid social polarisation. 'The results of our work can be seen in terms of the impact of an Opinion. The Council must communicate with the relevant target groups, but we must also ensure that our findings are brought to the attention of the general public.'

Swinkels realises that much of the Council's work will have a long-term impact rather than being of immediate importance. 'We must also accept that not all recommendations will be acted upon. Nevertheless,

many elements of our reports are reflected in government policy. Sometimes the official policy documents quote our Opinions verbatim. I have noticed this among other advisory bodies. It is what makes the work worthwhile.'

Swinkels believes that his most valuable contribution is his ability to present the viewpoints of those actively involved in the livestock farming sector, with whom he maintains close contacts in his day-to-day work. 'It is important to establish connections between science, research, policy and practice,' he remarks. He also believes that it is important to formulate the Council's opinions in a way that will maximise their input. 'It is often a question of choosing the right words.'

Philosopher Bas Haring: 'Let our work speak to the general public'

'The Council on Animal Affairs is extremely conscientious and thorough, and its Opinions are always sound, reliable documents,' says Bas Haring. 'This is good, but our readership should not be confined to civil servants and policymakers. We must speak to everyone.' This is why he was invited to sit on the Council, believes Haring who is the Professor of Public Understanding of Science at Leiden University.

It is important to think carefully about animal welfare, Prof. Haring contends, and the Council provides an excellent setting in which to do so. 'It is fascinating to be able to talk with people representing such diverse disciplines and backgrounds, and to arrive at Opinions which are considered useful by so many. A Council such as ours can be very effective in promoting animal welfare. We have the ear of the people "in charge". They listen to us and our work has a marked influence on policy and legislation.' As a member of the Council member, Bas Haring intends to devote attention to the way in which its message is presented. 'I like to translate complex material into easy-to-understand language. I think there is another role I can fill. As a philosopher, I have a good nose for interests. I shall make it my business to expose any hidden agendas since they make it impossible to conduct a good, fair discussion. In

some cases, viewpoints are so divergent that compromise is impossible. Take the debate about the large herbivores which live in the Oostvaardersplassen wetland region, for example. During particularly harsh winters, many animals can die of starvation. There are two very fixed, opposing points of view. One holds that nature is a value in itself and should be allowed to take its own course. Leave well alone! The other is that population control – culling – is essential in order to avoid unnecessary suffering. Rather than confining this to a black-and-white argument, we must ensure that both viewpoints are heard and considered. I see this as my role, and one which will raise the quality of the discussion. If there is one thing I want to achieve in the years ahead, it is to ensure that the Council's work finds favour not only with the politicians and policymakers but with the general public.'

Photo: Wiebe Kiestra



The Council at work

Membership of the Council

The Council on Animal Affairs is an independent body of experts which advises the Minister for Agriculture on matters relating to national and international policy on animal health and welfare. It does so both on request and at its own initiative. The issues under consideration are often complex and multidisciplinary in nature, whereupon the Council strives to base its findings and recommendations on the most recent scientific, social and ethical insights. According to its statutes, the Council comprises 'one chairperson and no more than 49 other members', all of whom act in a personal capacity and are neither accountable to, nor influenced by, any external body or organisation. During the report year, the Council had approximately forty active members. The exact figure fluctuated due to resignations and appointments.

Members are appointed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport may co-opt members to take part in specific discussions.

Meetings and requests for advice

The Council convened on two occasions during the report period: on 7 February 2014 in Utrecht and on 7 November 2014 in Baarn. The February meeting was attended by 23 members (out of a possible 34) and the November meeting was attended by 17 (out of 33).

On 2 July 2014, the Minister for Agriculture, Sharon Dijksma, formally requested the Council's Opinion on 'demonstrating the desirability of genetically modified organisms.' A forum was formed and held its first meeting in Utrecht on 28 August. It reconvened on 2 October (Houten), 7 November (Baarn) and 4 December (Utrecht).

In Memoriam Alex Ploeg



It was with immense sadness that the Council learnt of the death of Dr Alex Ploeg, who had been a passenger on Flight MH17, the aircraft brought down over Ukraine on 17 July 2014. Alex Ploeg had been a member of the Council since September 2012. He will be remembered for his long and valuable service to

the retail pet industry, both as a member of the Council and as Secretary of the trade federation DiBeVo.

Alex often made his contributions at unexpected moments, drawing attention to important issues which were not on the agenda and which may not even have occurred to his colleagues. He regarded his appointment to the Council on Animal Affairs as a milestone in his career. He devoted his entire professional life to promoting effective legislation to ensure responsible pet ownership. He examined every proposal with a critical eye: was it necessary and was it well founded? Alex Ploeg was a scientist who adopted the scientist's methodical approach. He would analyse, assess, improve, and evaluate. His scientific background proved particularly valuable when he was required to consider an important sector-wide topic such as the conditions for responsible pet ownership. What knowledge should a person be expected to have before they are permitted to sell and animal or keep an animal? What types of pet should be subject to formal requirements? Alex Ploeg was a fervent proponent of a transparent and accountable assessment system. This is the stance that the government eventually adopted. All members and staff of the Council on Animal Affairs were deeply shocked by Alex Ploeg's untimely death. We miss him.



Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

Council members and their backgrounds

Name

Area of expertise

Focus (Practice, Research and/or Policy)

Prof. J.J.M. van Alphen

Animal ecology

Research

Prof. J.A.M. van Arendonk

Breeding and genetics

Research

Dr H.M.G. van Beers

Pig farming; veterinary pharmaceuticals

Research, Practice

A.G. Dijkhuis

Fauna management; Spatial development

Practice, Policy

W. van Eijk

Aquaculture

Practice, Policy

Prof. A.A. Freriks

Animal Law; Environmental Law

Research, Practice

Prof. S. Haring

Philosophy and Computer Science

Research, Practice

Prof. L.J. Hellebrekers

Veterinary medicine; pets and companion animals

Policy, Research

Prof. W.H. Hendriks

Animal diet and nutrition

Research

Dr S.A. Hertzberger

Retail

Practice, Policy

J. Hesterman

Domestic and semi-domestic animals

Practice

A.J.M. van Hoof

Dairy sector; Animal Health

Practice, Policy

Dr H. Hopster

Animal Welfare

Research, Policy

Prof. R.B.M. Huirne

Animal husbandry and Economics

Research, Practice, Policy

M.J.B. Jansen

Retail

Policy

Prof. M.C.M. de Jong

Veterinary epidemiology

Research

J. T. de Jongh

Domestic and companion animals

Policy

M. de Jong

Animal protection

Policy

J. Kaandorp

Zoos and animal parks

Research, Practice, Policy

Prof. F. van Knapen

Veterinary and public health

Research, Policy

Prof. P.A. Koolmees

History of veterinary medicine

Research

Dr F.L.B. Meijboom

Ethics

Research

Prof. F. Ohl (chairperson)

Behavioural biology; Animal welfare

Research

P.I. Polman

Domestic and semi-domestic animals

Practice, Policy

F. van der Schans

Agriculture and Environment

Research, Policy

Prof. M.M. Sloet van Oldruitenborg-

Oosterbaan

Equine health and medicine

Research, Policy Practice

Prof. J.A. Stegeman

Livestock health and medicine

Research

M.H.A. Steverink

Organic livestock farming and chain management

Practice, Policy

H.W.A. Swinkels

Veal production

Practice, Policy

Dr J.W.G.M. Swinkels

Sustainable livestock and meat supply chains

Policy, Practice

Prof. J.C.M. van Trijp

Marketing, Consumer behaviour

Research

H.M. van Veen

Animal protection; labelling and accreditation

Policy, Practice

P.J. Vingerling

Chain management

Practice

Stepped down from the Council

Ir. J. Lokhorst, per 1/7/2014

W. Zwanenburg, per 1/7/2014

Drs. P.L. Polman MPH, per 7/11/2014

Personnel and Organisation 2014

Staff establishment

- Laurens Hoedemaker, Council secretary, resigned per 1 July 2014.
- Roland Thönissen, adjunct secretary until October 2014.
- Angela van der Togt, management assistant since 26 March 2014.
- Marc Schakenraad, Council secretary per 1 October 2014.

Photo: de Beeldkuil

