

COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





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Bert Kleiboer

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Council on Animal Affairs (RDA)

Bezuidenhoutseweg 73

2594 AC The Hague

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2020 ANNUAL REPORT



RAAD VOOR DIERENAANGELEGENHEDEN

Aim and activities of the Council

The Council on Animal Affairs (Dutch: *Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden*; RDA) is an independent Dutch council of experts that gives the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (Dutch: Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur & Voedselkwaliteit; LNV) solicited and unsolicited advice on multidisciplinary issues in the field of animal health, welfare and ethical issues. The RDA currently comprises 41 members with very different backgrounds and expertise, whose membership is in a personal capacity and not bound by any instructions or binding mandate.

The Council on Animal Affairs deals with issues across the entire spectrum of public policy on production animals, laboratory animals, hobby farm animals, companion animals, animals in captivity and animals in the wild.

The Council documents the outcome of its considerations in an advisory report. This gives details of the scientific and social background of an issue and gives advice on policy directions and solution directions for dilemmas. Consensus is not necessary: a Council advisory report can contain minority opinions.

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Preface: Initiating change processes



In February 2021, two municipalities announced the introduction of mandatory chipping for cats: a development that is of great interest to the Council on Animal Affairs. This was a measure that we recommended in our report on ‘Managing the stray cat population’ back in 2016 as one of the options to address the Netherlands’ stray cat problem. Back then, the timing was not yet right.

We are not mentioning this news to prove we were right five years ago. The reason this development is interesting is because it shows how change works. Sometimes ideas need time to mature.

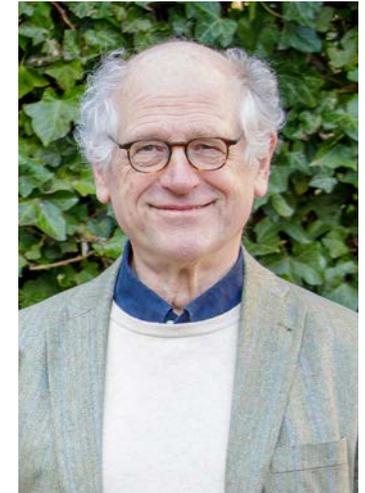
The RDA has a great role. As an independent group of experts, we set this maturing process in motion. How we do so has evolved. In the early years, we put together a group of experts who withdrew themselves in order to deliver a well-substantiated recommendation a few months later. This approach has changed. The Council seeks external input from people with practical experience and specific expertise, to ensure a stronger basis and better alignment with social developments.

This means that it can take a relatively long time for us to publish a report. However, the outcome is better. And what’s more: the process is just as important as the result. The Council’s work creates a stir. Attention is drawn to the subject, new ideas emerge, people are activated, contacts are established. It doesn’t always take five years for something to happen, as in the case of chipping for cats. The process is often faster. In some cases, a recommendation made in a report is implemented before the report has been printed and published.

The bottom line is: we initiate processes. It starts when the Council launches a working group, and from that time on it is a work in progress. 2020 is a special year in that respect. Not only have we completed two advisory reports, ‘Animals in Circular Agriculture’ and ‘Care of Young Animals’, but we are also working on reports on six other topics. Five of



Marc Schakenraad, Secretary



Jan Staman, Chair

Photographs: Paul Voorham Photography

these stem from our report on ‘The State of the Animal’: a major study showing that society’s attitudes towards animals are changing. The report addresses questions about the position of animals in practice, and brings attention back to moral frictions. The RDA wants to address these issues and provide some clarity. We hope that the change processes we initiate by doing so will help to strengthen the position of animals in the Netherlands.

Marc Schakenraad, Secretary

Jan Staman, Chair

Care of young animals is the subject of one of the two advisory reports completed in 2020.



Photograph: David Mark

RDA in 2020 - Work in progress

The term ‘work in progress’ describes the year 2020 in a number of respects. Firstly, the Council is working hard to expand on the topics raised in ‘The State of the Animal’. Two new advisory reports have been completed. At the same time, six working groups are tackling other themes. Alongside these subjects, the Council also faced other issues, including, of course, the coronavirus pandemic. Read on for a comprehensive overview.

The State of the Animal

The Council performed a status review in 2019 in a report titled ‘The State of the Animal’. The lives of animals have progressively improved over the past few decades. Awareness of and concern for the welfare and health of almost all species of animals has increased, and the legal protection afforded to many animals has improved. Public attitudes towards animals in the Netherlands have also changed. The idea of man as ruler over animals gradually gives way to an attitude characterised by a sense of commitment to animals and acceptance of their individuality. There is a social shift towards a new alliance or partnership between people and animals. The Council observes that an increased

public focus on animal welfare and increased technical possibilities are also placing ever-higher demands on animal owners and farming systems. On top of this, there are ‘moral frictions’ that need to be resolved. The advisory reports that were completed in 2020 or that are still in progress stem largely from these issues.

Two advisory reports in 2020

The start of the year saw the completion of the first report: ‘Animals in Circular Agriculture’. This advisory report is an unsolicited response by the Council to the vision of the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV), which calls for a transition towards more sustainable agricultural production: circular agriculture. The Minister’s vision focuses on environmental impact. The Council argues in its report that this does not automatically improve the position of animals (see also page 14).

The second advisory report completed in 2020 is ‘Care of Young Animals’. This report is an elaboration of one of the moral frictions in ‘The State of the Animal’, namely ‘young animal mortality’. Publication took place in 2021. The advisory report was published and



Photograph: iStock

presented to the outgoing Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality on 25 January 2021 (see also page 16).

The killing of animals

Alongside young animal mortality, another moral friction concerns the killing of animals. The Council anticipates that changing public attitudes towards animals will lead to further discussion on this topic.

The Council usually commissions a single working group of experts to explore a topic in depth. For this topic, the decision was made to work with a small core group of five members, plus four subgroups focusing on different reasons for killing animals (undesirability, nuisance, suffering and practical purposes).



A broad topic

“The topic is extremely broad. The problem is very different for production animals that are killed for food compared, for example, to animals that cause a nuisance or animals that need to be culled to keep a disease outbreak under control. We look at questions like: why is killing justified, how is it carried out, and what welfare issues and public concerns play a role?” explains the coordinator for this topic Dr Franck Meijboom, Senior University Lecturer in Ethics at Utrecht University. “The groups were launched in 2019. We worked hard throughout 2020 to gather all the information. Our aim for 2021 is to bring everything together and hopefully issue a report by the end of the year. We want to show where the differences lie and what that says about how people treat animals. This opens the various approaches to discussion and provides a framework for debate on the killing of animals. We are also seeking to formulate recommendations for policy and legislation. We will not arrive at a single generic recommendation or conclusion. I anticipate that the topic will give rise to follow-up groups.”

Love is blind

In addition to the killing of animals, a sometimes blind love for animals can also be problematic. Much has changed in the relationship between humans and animals in recent decades. Where animals originally had specific functions, such as pest control, an aid to hunting or the provision of strength, many people now keep animals purely for companionship. People care more and more about their pets. But is this always a good thing? The working group for the topic ‘Love is Blind’ asks whether this love can get out of hand.



Photograph: iStock



A double-edged sword

“In more and more households, animals are seen as almost fully-fledged family members in which all kinds of human characteristics are recognised. The stronger social and emotional bond with pets has led to a great deal of good, however there are also concerns. People feed animals the wrong things, for example, leading to rising obesity in pets. Or animals are bred for extreme physical characteristics. Which makes the stronger bond that many people experience with their pets a double-edged sword,” states the coordinator for this topic Ruud Tombrock, Executive Director for Europe at the animal welfare organisation Humane Society International. “We have spoken to experts about a

Portrait photographs: Paul Voorham Photography

wide range of animals, from dogs and cats to horses and parrots. Everyone shares the concerns. And yet little research has been done; we cannot substantiate the problem with hard data. We are elaborating the advisory report in the form of an essay. We don't just focus on owners, but also specifically on breeders, veterinarians, animal trainers and the government. The most important thing is to remember: an animal is an animal. A dog, a cat or a hamster has behaviour and needs that are specific to its species. You need to take this into account. In the interest of the animal."

The position of the wolf

Public attitudes towards animals also play a major role in the topic 'The position of the wolf'. Following an absence of 150



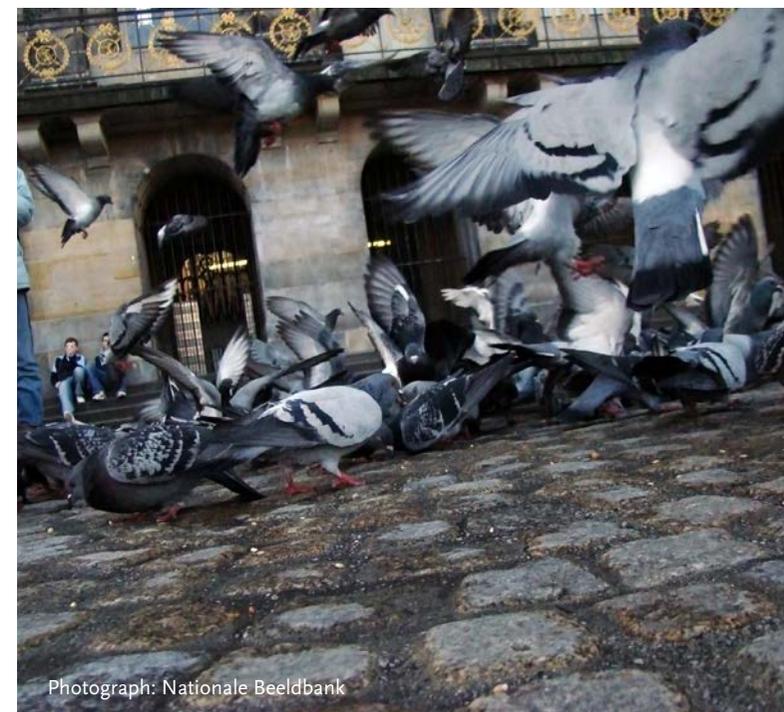
Photograph: iStock

years, the wolf has returned to the Netherlands. Open borders and European protections mean that wolves are here to stay. The Council does not consider practical consequences, such as protection measures or compensation, but rather the strong emotions aroused by the animal.



The wolf as a socially divisive issue

"Due to the conflicting societal reactions that the wolf evokes, this is not a subject on which we, as the Council on Animal Affairs, 'simply' advise on the best scientific approach to the issue. The problem is not so much a lack of knowledge, but conflicting emotions and values. Whereas some will appreciate the fact that we once again have a true natural environment in which such a large predator has a place, others will see the wolf as a threat. Farmers and landowners in particular will experience problems with wolves in practice. There is a risk that the wolf will become symbolic of conflicting underlying values: a socially divisive issue. Perhaps in this type of situation we need some kind of social mediation: a healing dialogue," says Marjan Slob, philosopher, writer and coordinator for this topic. "Over the past year, we have analysed the problem and taken stock of views and underlying emotions. We will incorporate all of this into a document that we will present to the Council in 2021. The follow-up remains open. It will most likely not be a traditional advisory report. We view it as more of a call to organise a public debate on the conflicting values surrounding the wolf."



Photograph: Nationale Beeldbank

The animal at different levels of government

Municipalities, provinces and administrative structures such as water boards are increasingly faced with issues relating to animals and animal welfare. This can vary from biting incidents involving dogs and rehabilitation of animals to livestock farmers' expansion plans and policy on nature reserves. On top of this, local authorities have been assigned more tasks by central government. A large number of municipalities and provinces have appointed animal welfare portfolio holders in recent years. Memorandums have also been drawn up on animal welfare. As part of the topic 'The animal at different levels of government', the Council is exploring the possibilities and challenges that portfolio holders encounter in the formulation and implementation of animal welfare policy.



Analysing desirability from the animal's perspective

“We have gathered a large amount of data in the last year. First, we identified the extent to which local authorities have an active animal welfare policy. We then interviewed administrators about what they do, what issues they are addressing, what obstacles they encounter and how implementation is embedded within the organisation. We took the broadest possible approach: a wide range of government authorities – in both urban and rural areas – and organisations with different political backgrounds.” So says the coordinator for this topic, Jeroen Candel, Senior University Lecturer in Public Administration at Wageningen University & Research. “In 2021 we will elaborate on that information and draw conclusions. What is the RDA's position on this? From the animal's perspective, is it desirable for animal welfare to have a place at so many different levels of government, and how can it best be organised?”

Humane livestock farming

The topic ‘Human Livestock Farming’ is partly a follow-up to the report on ‘Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture’. In that recommendation, the Council calls for a focus on animals in the transition to circular agriculture. This follow-up elaborates on what ‘humane livestock farming’ means. The basic principle is ‘positive animal welfare’: in other words, aspects that contribute towards animal welfare. This is a different approach to making adjustments to existing systems, which focuses on removing negative aspects. The Council started to explore this topic on its own initiative in 2020. In February 2021, outgoing Minister Schouten of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality submitted a request for advice.



Photo: iStock t-lorien



Government action needed

“The Minister has formally asked the Council to work out the guiding principles for humane livestock farming. This is a subject that we already know a great deal about - from scientific research in areas such as animal physiology and behaviour. We will supplement this knowledge based on social and ethical views where possible,” says the coordinator for this topic, Prof. Gerda van Dijk, Professor of Public Leadership at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. “In the advisory report, which we will publish in 2021, we add another step on our own initiative. We also want to say something

about government action. That is necessary because it will not happen on its own. You can't expect business owners to simply go through the list of guiding principles. Livestock farmers are not against humane livestock farming, but they operate within an economic and social context. A context that will alter significantly in the coming years due to climate change. How will humane livestock farming evolve then? And how can the government play a facilitating role in this process? One thing is certain: something needs to change in livestock farming. We already saw in ‘The State of the Animal’ that society is attaching increasing importance to humane livestock farming.”

Portrait photographs: Paul Voorham Photography



Solicited advisory report on ‘Wildlife Rehabilitation’

One topic was launched in response to a request for advice in 2020. In August 2020, Minister Schouten of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality requested an advisory report on the rehabilitation of wild animals in need. With this request, the Minister was implementing a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives. The topic also ties in with ‘The State of the Animal’, one of the conclusions of which is that the public have a growing concern for animal welfare and do not want to see animals suffer.

The rehabilitation of animals in need of help is enshrined in law. People have a duty to care for animals in need. Implementation is largely dependent on voluntary organisations, who face a lack of clarity and practical constraints. The Minister has asked the Council whether and how animals in need should be helped and by whom.



Habitat fragmentation is a problem

“It’s a fascinating topic with many different aspects. You only have to look at the question: which animals are affected? In practice, it’s mainly birds and mammals. But the boundaries are unclear. For instance, how do you deal with invasive exotic species? We want to keep the Egyptian goose out of the Netherlands, but what do you do if one is run over and taken to an animal shelter? As an ecologist I also ask myself: what is the point; is saving a single animal useful for the population?” These are the words of the

Portrait photograph: Paul Voorham Photography

coordinator for this topic, Prof. Jacques van Alphen, Biologist and Professor Emeritus at the Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity. “We took stock of and structured this issue in 2020. We consulted many practitioners. We will reach conclusions and draw up recommendations in the first half of 2021. It is already clear that an organisational challenge lies ahead. Central government has laid the burden of responsibility with the provinces, and each province has adopted a different approach. There are also differences at municipal level. Habitat fragmentation is a problem. There’s a need for structure, clear rules, training and financing.”

Animal affairs and the pandemic

The year 2020 is inextricably associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Lockdown measures affected how the Council was able to work (see also page 19). There is also a direct, substantive link to animal affairs. The coronavirus is a zoonosis: an infectious disease that can spread from animals to humans.

The RDA has held extensive discussions on the implications.

Now is the time to discuss how we coexist with animals

“We need to ask ourselves: how do we contain zoonoses as soon as they appear and prevent an infection from becoming a pandemic? Now is the time for national and international discussions about how we coexist with one another and with animals,” says Jan Staman, chair of the RDA.

“We need to think about preventive measures at both national and international level. The scientific, political and administrative echelons should be given ample scope to develop a global control strategy. We need new insights in order to make more targeted choices when it comes to the keeping of animals and, in particular, the contact structure between humans, captive animals and wild animals. If ever there was a reason to bring together all the separate approaches with continuous monitoring, an adequate infrastructure and a tightened global protocol, it is this pandemic.”

“We will not achieve anything if the pandemic is used to demonise livestock farming. There is work to be done and there could be a far-reaching impact on livestock farming in the future and on our relationship with companion animals.”

Other activities

The Council does more than publish advisory reports at the request of the Minister or on its own initiative. It also publishes reports and opinion articles and organises online meetings with the aim of reaching various target groups.

Opinion

In July 2020, animal ethicist and Council member Franck Meijboom wrote an opinion article for Dutch newspaper ‘de Volkskrant’ on the intrinsic value of animals. The article was in response to culling at mink farms where coronavirus had been detected. ([The intrinsic value of the mink](#))

In October 2020, RDA chair Jan Staman wrote an opinion article for ‘de Volkskrant’ and ‘De Stentor’ on the need for

scientific substantiation for the real, species-specific needs of an animal. ([Humanising animals has a grim side](#))

Meetings

The [fourth Vaarkamp lecture](#) took place on 30 January 2020 (‘Animal breeding, who are we doing it for?’, see also page 12). On 3 November 2020, the RDA organised a digital [discussion meeting on ‘The State of the Animal’](#). This was originally planned as a physical meeting, but became a webinar due to coronavirus measures (see also page 22).



Vaarkamp lecture: Animal breeding, who are we doing it for

The breeding of farm animals and companion animals is a subject of debate. Is enough attention being paid to the intrinsic value and welfare of animals? How is public opinion evolving? These were the key questions asked during the fourth Vaarkamp lecture. Animal breeding, who are we doing it for?



The topic was discussed by three speakers: Johan van Arendonk of international animal breeding company Hendrix Genetics, Hille Fieten of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Melanie Peters of the Rathenau Institute.

Van Arendonk provided insight into dilemmas when it comes to the breeding of production animals. Ecological sustainability is becoming more and more important, and selection based on characteristics that reduce the ecological footprint is sometimes at odds with animal welfare. Incorporating the various sustainability dimensions into a single breeding programme is a challenge. Innovations in animal breeding are crucial, said Van Arendonk. In that context, he also argued for a degree of scope for experimentation in genome editing

techniques such as CRISPR-Cas. Hille Fieten of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine talked about the health problems of companion animals with extreme breed characteristics. Advanced selection based on certain breed characteristics in dogs and cats and inbreeding is leading to hereditary disorders and harmful external characteristics. Fieten explained how the Expertise Centre Genetics of Companion Animals, of which she is Director, can contribute towards solutions. Melanie Peters, Director of the Rathenau Institute, discussed dilemmas concerning the use of technology and how veterinarians and breeders can fulfil their responsibilities. Peters called on veterinarians to stand up for their profession and their expertise, and to take responsibility in the social debates.

Entering into a dialogue

The Vaarkamp lecture is a joint production by the RDA and Utrecht University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, at the request of the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. It is a regular lecture on topics surrounding animal welfare and health in the Netherlands.

The fourth edition took place on 30 January 2020 in Utrecht University Hall. The lecture theatre was full and the audience was diverse, which led to good discussions. That is also the purpose of the event, explained RDA chair Jan Staman in his opening speech. "It's good to enter into and maintain a dialogue with each other over the moral, ethical and philosophical issues that sometimes divide us when it comes to the keeping of animals."

A [comprehensive media report](#) on the meeting is available (in Dutch) on the RDA website.





Imke de Boer, working group chair

Animal welfare in circular agriculture

Independent advisory report

In Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) Schouten’s Vision for the Future (September 2018), the Dutch agricultural sector needs to transition to circular agriculture. This vision for circular agriculture barely touches on animal welfare. The RDA has therefore drawn up an advisory report on its own initiative to identify the possible consequences for production animals. What opportunities and threats does the transition to circular agriculture pose to animal welfare?

“Animals certainly have a function in circular agriculture, we quickly agreed on that,” explains Prof. Imke de Boer, chair of the RDA working group that prepared the advisory report ‘Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture’. De Boer is a professor of Animal Production Systems at Wageningen University & Research (WUR). “Animals can utilise and convert residual streams from the food system – such as crop residues and by-products from the food industry – and grass into high-quality food, and thus utilise nutrients and carbon that would otherwise be lost to our food system.” Animals, particularly ruminants, can also contribute to other ecosystems, such as maintaining the landscape or biodiversity, and improving soil quality.

The implementation of the concept of circular agriculture will have consequences for the structure of the livestock farming sector and the welfare of production animals. By identifying these consequences, the RDA aims to ensure that animal welfare will be allocated a role in the transition to circular agriculture. “The guiding principle of the RDA is always ‘production with respect for animal welfare’,” explains De Boer. “Animal welfare is the quality of life as experienced by the animal itself and encompasses more than animal health alone”. The working group identified the animal welfare concerns in circular agriculture during meetings and interviews with experts and by performing a literature review. “It has emerged that more attention needs to be paid to the consequences for animal welfare,” says the working group chair. “Circular agriculture poses both opportunities for and threats to animals.”

Nutritional quality of residual products

One of the areas the Council looked at was the risks of using residual streams. “If we want to have more and new residual streams, we need to think in cycles, in terms of processing and collection and during quality control. For the safe use of swill and slaughter by-products, for instance, we need to

ensure that these raw materials are processed in such a manner that they do not pose any health risks to humans, animals and the environment.”

Nutritional quality is also relevant. “The feed formulation will need to be adjusted if we intend to use more residual streams and crop residues,” says the WUR professor. “Another aspect that we would like to highlight is that the production level of farm animals can change: a dairy cow that eats more grass and fewer concentrates will produce less milk, while a pig fed with more residue streams will grow at a slower pace. Animal breeders also have a role to play here; more robust animals will probably be able to cope more easily with the changes involved in circular agriculture. Moreover, more robust animals are expected to be more resistant to production-related health problems, so we can create a win-win situation here.”

Manure

In an agriculture system with as many closed cycles as possible, focus should furthermore be placed on the quality and application of livestock manure. Where manure and urine are captured separately, it is easier to process these products into valuable fertilisers. Outdoor access may therefore need to be redesigned, De Boer observes. “We will ultimately need to design farming systems for the various production animal categories that do justice to the principles of circular agriculture and animal welfare.”

Humane livestock farming

The Council recommends utilising the transition to move forward in building a livestock farming sector that respects the dignity of animals. The time required to develop the concept of ‘circular agriculture’ can be utilised to take a

number of necessary steps to improve animal welfare. The Council would like to contribute to developing, gathering and sharing the knowledge required for this purpose, says De Boer. “We would like to involve representatives from the government, the business sector and NGOs in this.”

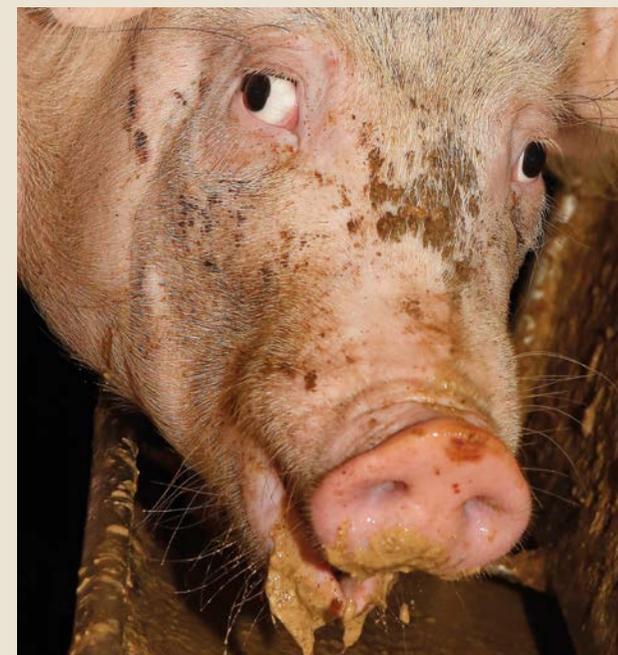
Advisory committee and centre of expertise

The Council recommends appointing an advisory committee – consisting of participants from various interest groups – to promote animal welfare in circular agriculture. This advisory committee can formulate animal welfare aspects for the research agenda, identify parameters for monitoring and advise on institutionally protecting animal welfare both within and outside the Netherlands. A centre of expertise for animal welfare can serve as a source of information and a platform for exchanging knowledge; this is essential for entrepreneurs who want to embark on the transition to circular agriculture. Furthermore, the RDA advocates investing in research focusing on animal welfare in circular agriculture. In addition, it is important to strengthen and improve networks within Europe to create a broad support base for protecting and improving animal welfare in circular systems.

Follow-up: humane livestock farming

The [advisory report ‘Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture’](#) was published in May 2020, alongside a [summary](#) and an [animation](#). Following its publication, the report received wide attention in specialist agricultural publications such as Boerderij, Nieuwe Oogst and De Molenaar. The advisory report prompted Vork magazine and media at the Wageningen University & Research (WUR) and the Royal Dutch Society for Veterinary Medicine (KNMvD) to devote attention to the RDA.

Outgoing Minister Schouten of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality endorses the recommendation to work out the preconditions for humane livestock farming and in February 2021 asked the Council to issue an advisory report. This will be part of the topic ‘Human Livestock Farming’.



Photograph: Henk Riswick

This advisory report was prepared by a working group chaired by Prof. I.J.M. de Boer, the other members of which were Dr G.B.C. Backus, W.T.A.A.G.M. van den Bergh, Prof. J.W. Erisman, J.A.M. Huijbers and Prof. B. Kemp. The working group was supplemented by Dr R.A. Jongeneel of Wageningen University & Research (WUR) and Dr L.M. Stadig, Young RDA. Deputy secretary R. Pothoven and secretary M.H.W. Schakenraad of the RDA agency provided assistance.



Working group chair Bert van den Berg

Care of young animals

Advisory report requested by the Minister

The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality requested the Council in July 2020 to issue an advisory report on caring for young animals, in particular calves, piglets and goat kids. This issue also ties in with one of the moral frictions in ‘The State of the Animal’, namely ‘young animal mortality’. The Council has therefore dealt with the question in a broader context and included several animal species in its report.

“During the first exchanges of ideas in the working group, it quickly emerged that ‘young animal mortality’ is the result of a process,” says working group chair Bert van den Berg, Council member and Livestock Farming Programme Manager at the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. “The problem that we humans have with the death of young animals lies not just in the death itself, but primarily in the process leading up to death. That process is the care of young animals.”

Wide variation

“In addition to calves, piglets and goat kids, we also included poultry, rabbits, cats and dogs in our study, as early death also plays a role in these other animal categories,” says Van den Berg. In the case of companion animals, the diversity is great: from private individuals with an occasional litter to companies that breed companion animals for a living. There is therefore

a wide variation in how these animals are cared for in their first few critical weeks of life. “Although we were unable to collect much in the way of hard data about care of and mortality amongst young companion animals, it is clear that there remains room for improvement in this category of care as well.”

Subgroups of working group members analysed the mortality figures for each animal category and formulated various points for attention. As a result, it quickly became clear that sectors can learn from each other. “Whereas accurate records are kept of mortality figures in the dairy farming industry, for example, such a structured approach is still under development in the goat industry. In addition, there are significant differences across the formal and informal companion animal sector,” observes Van den Berg.

Guidance to improve care

An understanding of the figures is important in order to unpack the issue. It helps to give direction to the discussion. It also provides guidance for improving the care of young animals so as to reduce young animal mortality. “We can see many opportunities for improvement. Although the collected data per sector are often incomplete or non-specific, it is nonetheless evident that there are often considerable differences between animal owners and animal husbandry systems. This variation provides scope for improvement



measures,” comments Van den Berg. “With our advisory report, we also hope to offer animal owners perspective for action; while animal owners themselves always have ultimate responsibility for the welfare of their animals, they need concrete guidance to improve the care of these animals, where necessary.” Other stakeholders, such as advisers and veterinarians, can likewise play an important role in this regard.

Greater insight into the mortality figures and the underlying factors can also help in reducing the polarisation in the public debate on this matter.

Comparing results with others

“Our main conclusion is that animal owners can learn a lot from one another,” says Van den Berg. This will require them to record data systematically and be willing to share those data. Reliable data will enable a benchmarking system to be set up on a sector-by-sector basis, providing animal owners with insight into their own results compared with others in the same field. “It is not a matter of doubting the good intentions of an animal owner, but neither should animal owners automatically think that they know it all and are doing everything correctly. A willingness to reflect and make adjustments where necessary shows that you are taking responsibility for the care you provide and that you are doing what you can.”

Good understanding of the various factors that determine young animal mortality enables targeted measures to be taken to improve their care and reduce the mortality rate. While this requires animal owners to invest in better recording capabilities, this will eventually pay off in the form of improved care of young animals, reduced premature mortality, improved results and enhanced societal acceptance of the livestock sector. Van den Berg also sees opportunities for using technical resources: “Digital technologies, such as sensors and cameras in animal sheds, can now ensure that individual animals once again receive the attention they deserve.”

Presentation and reactions

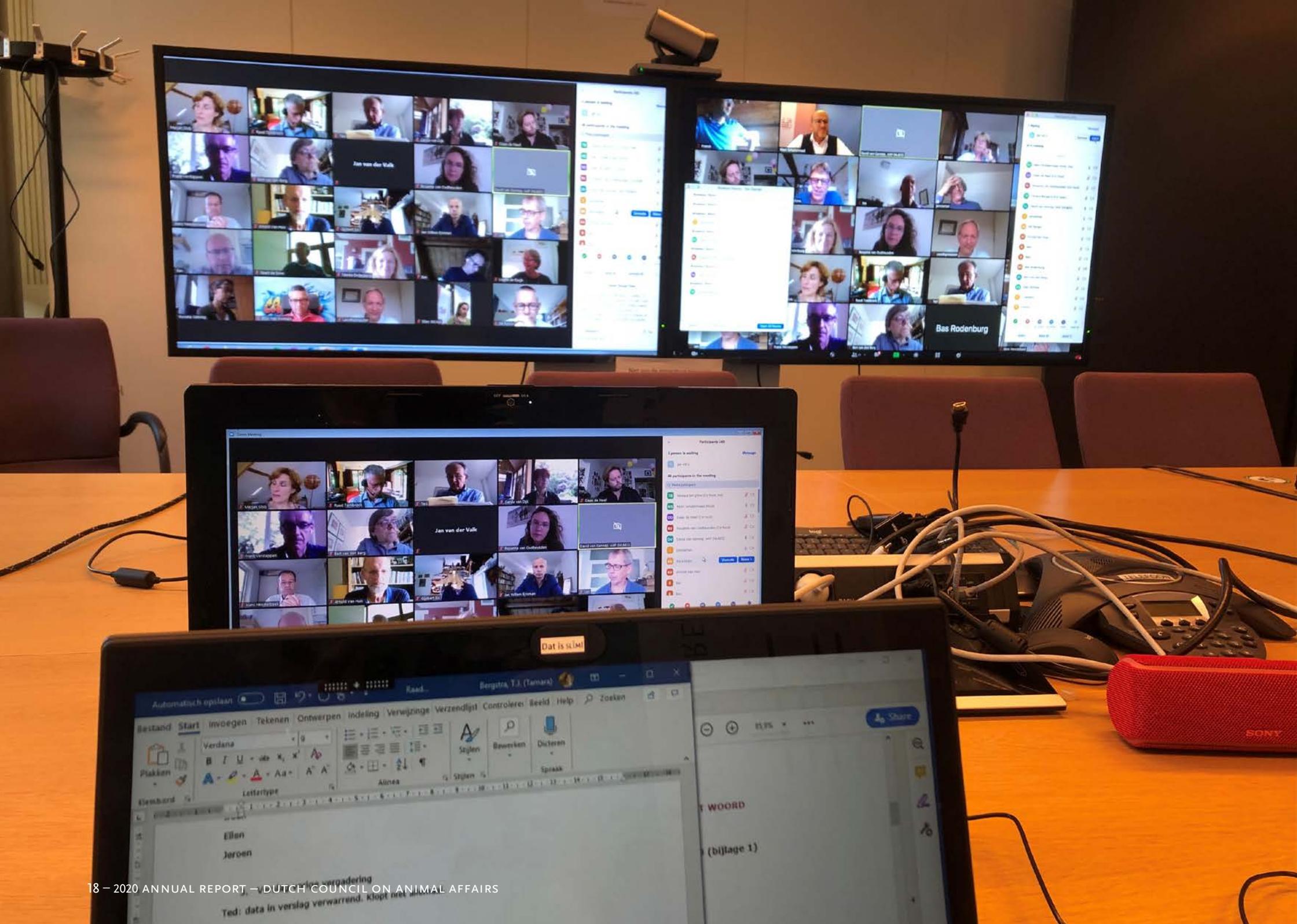
The advisory report ‘Care of young animals’ was presented to the Minister during a webinar in January 2021. The report

received attention in the agricultural trade press, including articles in *Nieuwe Oogst* and *Varkens*. Reactions from farming organisations were positive. Administrators in the dairy, pig and goat sectors feel encouraged by the initiatives that have been put in place to tackle young animal mortality.

The full [advisory report](#), a [summary](#) and an [animation](#) on the subject are available (in Dutch) on the RDA website.



This advisory report was prepared by a working group comprising G.P. van den Berg (Chair), D.M. Eppink, DVM MSc (Young RDA), Prof. R. Gehring, Prof. L.A. den Hartog, A.L. ten Have Mellema, G. Hofstra, A. Kemps, Dr F.L.B. Meijboom, Prof. T.B. Rodenburg, Prof. Y.H. Schukken, Dr H.A.P. Urlings and J. van de Ven. The working group was assisted by deputy secretary Dr K. van Hees and secretary M.H.W. Schakenraad of the RDA agency.



Team: work in progress during the pandemic

The Council is made up of experts from a very wide range of backgrounds. Council members can rely on support from the RDA agency in the performance of their work. With two advisory reports completed and another six under way, the team had its hands full in 2020. Coronavirus measures meant that things were done a little differently, leading to constraints in some cases and new opportunities in others.

The first lockdown was announced in March 2020. At that time, the advisory report ‘Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture’ was going to press. The report was scheduled for presentation in April 2020 during a specially organised theme meeting. The event had to be postponed and was eventually cancelled. The launch of the advisory report was limited to publication of the document on the RDA website, alongside a summary, an animation and a press release. “At that time we did not yet have experience with the digital possibilities,” observes Ruud Pothoven in hindsight. “For the advisory report ‘Care of young animals’, which we completed at the end of 2020, that had changed. We organised a webinar to launch that report in January 2021.”

Efficient meetings

This shows that the organisation has adapted to the new situation. Over the year it became clear that the threat of coronavirus was here to stay. The team switched from the familiar office environment and physical meetings to online working and Zoom meetings.

In some cases, remote working produced unexpected benefits. “It suddenly became much easier to schedule appointments,”

says office manager Sandra Veeren. “People had more space in their diaries because they no longer had to commute.”

The convenience of online meetings meant that some processes became faster during the pandemic than in ‘the old normal’. This efficiency came in handy, for instance, for the topic ‘The Killing of Animals’: a sensitive and wide-ranging subject that is being handled by a core group with four separate subgroups instead of a single working group. That means a lot of meetings.

Limitless possibilities

For the topic ‘The Position of the Wolf’, online meetings offer literally limitless possibilities. “You are more likely to approach people, so your world expands. We’ve talked to people from Norway and the US. That’s valuable, because we have less experience of this subject in the Netherlands,” says Rosanne van Oudheusden.

Something similar occurred with the discussion meeting on ‘The State of the Animal’. This was originally scheduled to take place at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, exclusively for ministry policy officers. By necessity, the event became a webinar and was held in November. “When we announced that it would be a virtual meeting, we also received applications from other government organisations, the business sector and NGOs,” says Tamara Bergstra. “The webinar therefore produced some very interesting discussions.”

A lot of fieldwork was done by telephone. “Talking to lots of people gives you an insight, although we missed paying a

working visit. You want to be able to take a look behind the scenes yourself,” says Rosanne van Oudheusden.

For topic such as ‘The Animal at Different Levels of Government’, ‘Love is Blind’ and ‘Wildlife Rehabilitation’, team members conducted remote interviews with numerous experts and practitioners.

One-to-one contact

The constraints of online meetings are noticeable in discussions of difficult subjects. “When people do not agree with each other, they often don’t speak out enough in an online meeting. This becomes apparent at the next meeting, when the discussion come back up,” says Ruud Pothoven, who is assisting the groups for the topic ‘The Killing of Animals’ alongside Tamara Bergstra. Kirsten van Hees, who is involved in the topic ‘Care of Young Animals’, has the same experience. She observed that one-to-one contact is a useful addition. “If you have talked about certain issues in a preliminary discussion, later group discussions are easier.”

The semi-annual Council meetings were also held online. It turns out that it is perfectly possible to give presentations and put together a varied programme for 50 participants with propositions and breakout sessions all via Zoom. But, once again, the personal touch is missing. Tamara Bergstra: “Everyone was very enthusiastic, but you miss out on the non-verbal communication, the one-to-one jokes and, of course, the final group dinner.”



Klaske Bos



Dennis Vink



Lisanne Stadig

Young RDA finds its place: ‘We ask different questions’

Young RDA is increasingly finding its place within the organisation. Members of the network have participated in working groups on five different topics. Work is also ongoing to involve young people in animal affairs.

Young RDA is a group of young professionals with diverse expertise and interests. The network of junior members was set up in 2018 and its membership expanded from six to sixteen in 2019. This group of professionals in their twenties and thirties has the task of strengthening the relationship between their generation and the Council. “Young people look at current interests and future developments from their own perspective,” says chair Klaske Bos (30). “It’s useful to offer the senior members of the RDA a fresh approach and a different view. We are an enthusiastic and motivated group. We are part of the RDA, but a separate club within the organisation.”

Secretary Lisanne Stadig (34) adds: “Our views do not necessarily differ in terms of content, but we do often have a different perspective on social developments. We ask different questions.” Young RDA member Dennis Vink (28) cites views on humane livestock farming as an example. “In the livestock

sector, the interests of food production quickly become the focus of attention, which means that only the specific details of the existing systems can be adapted. If you ask yourself whether we actually need animal products in our diets, you get a whole different debate.”

Participation in five working groups

Young RDA members have taken part in five different working groups over the past year. Stadig collaborated on ‘Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture’. Vink is a member of one of the subgroups for ‘The Killing of Animals’. In addition to its substantive input, Young RDA also plays a role in reaching a young audience. The basis for this was established in 2020. A scheduled theme day had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. The Young RDA is keen to explore other communication channels. Vink was been involved in the preparation of a podcast format. “Under the title DierAanBodCast, the Young RDA will bring a young audience to discussions about animals.”

An attractive network

Young RDA is an attractive network for young professionals, asserts Stadig. “In the context of the RDA, we take a much

broader approach to animal welfare than merely our own area of expertise.” The membership is diverse. Stadig studied veterinary medicine and animal sciences and works as a livestock farming policy officer for the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. Vink is a behavioural biologist with experience in areas including zoos, and has an interest in animal welfare and ethics. Bos is a graduate in biomedical sciences and has extensive knowledge of issues surrounding laboratory animals. “We learn a lot from our discussions,” says Bos. “We all have different backgrounds, but we are all strongly committed to animal welfare.”



Andreas Dijkhuis: ‘The way we think about animals is changing’

Andreas Dijkhuis will step down from the Council in 2021 at the end of his maximum membership term. On this page, he looks back.

“It has refined how I think about animals,” he says when asked about his experience of two terms on the Council. “It has helped me a lot. Discussions with people from different disciplines, who ask questions from completely different perspectives, have taught me a great deal. As a hunter, I can now give much better explanations as to why I hunt.” Andreas Dijkhuis is a lawyer and hunter. He is the Director of the Dutch Association of Estate Agents and Valuers (NVR). Previously, up to 2011, he was General Secretary/Director of the Netherlands Shooting Association.

Rabbits

Dijkhuis’s expertise lies in wildlife – a subject that was still relatively unknown territory within the RDA a decade ago. “The Council focused mainly on production and companion animals. Wild animals need a different approach. We have a duty of care for all animals, but our practical interpretation of this duty varies widely.

A good example is the rabbit. You have rabbits bred for meat production, pet rabbits, laboratory rabbits and wild rabbits. For rabbits bred for meat and laboratory testing, you have a duty to ensure that these animals are treated humanely. For wild rabbits, our responsibilities lie in maintaining a healthy population.”

The first advisory report in which Dijkhuis was involved in 2012 was ‘Duty of Care, Naturally’. This report looked at whether or not we should intervene in the lives of ‘non-captive animals’. “Originally, the concept of animal welfare mainly applied to individual animals. It is different for wild animals. Sometimes you need to shoot animals in the interest of the population.”

Animal welfare and levels of government

In 2020, Dijkhuis was a member of working groups including ‘The Animal at Different Levels of Government’. This group is preparing an advisory report on the current allocation of responsibilities for animal welfare across different levels of government, from central government to provinces and municipalities. What strikes him is the major differences in interpretation of duties among local authorities. “There are members of the Provincial Executive and aldermen who strictly limit themselves to their legal remit. You also have administrators who, based on their personal beliefs, feel that animal welfare is so important that they use their position as portfolio holder to draw up their own policy.”

Ethical framework

Dijkhuis sees a conflict between strict interpretation of rules and social developments in several topics. He views it as the RDA’s task to incorporate these social aspects in its advisory reports. “Many experts tend to place a strong focus on the normative side: what does the law say? But you need an ethical



Andreas Dijkhuis

framework to assess legislation. Legislation is morality set in stone, the result of a political compromise that has sometimes taken up to ten years to achieve. By the time the law enters into force, thinking on the subject has already evolved. I advocate keeping the ethical framework as a guiding principle, to influence legislation. Three hundred years ago slavery was entirely legal and accepted by society. How people think about that issue has evolved, and, as a result, so too has the law.”

‘The State of the Animal’ webinar

During an online meeting on 3 November 2020, the RDA discussed ‘The State of the Animal’ and a number of follow-up subjects with policy officers and other professionals.

The discussion was originally scheduled as a physical meeting for policy officers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (EZK). Due to coronavirus measures, the seminar was switched to a webinar. In addition to ministry policy officers, other professionals were also welcome to attend the digital meeting. There were a total of 70 participants, including local and regional politicians and civil servants, representatives of NGOs and other interested parties.

The webinar consisted of a plenary session and a number of subsessions. In the plenary session, Council member Ynte Schukken and chair Jan Staman discussed the content of ‘The State of the Animal’ and the topics arising from the report.

‘The State of the Animal’ was published in 2019 to mark the RDA’s 25th anniversary. It is a comprehensive study, incorporating a public survey, of public attitudes towards animals. These attitudes have changed significantly in recent decades. Animals were once seen as a means of production. This has given way to a notion of ‘stewardship’.

“We take good care of animals and we manage them with respect. This has become the standard for almost all species of animal. We now see animals much more as partners with a right to a dignified existence and recognition of their individuality,” said Schukken during the webinar.

The view that we need to treat animals better naturally leads to moral frictions, argued Schukken. He cited the issue of starving animals in Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve as an example, as well as the pursuit of the right balance between nature and agriculture. The humanisation of pets, the killing of animals, and genetic modification remain thorny issues. Differences in provincial policies also lead to problems, as in the case of wild boar. The RDA is looking at all of these subjects as part of ongoing or future advisory reports.

In the subsessions, participants had the opportunity to discuss a number of these issues under the direction of RDA members who have been closely involved in the topics. The subjects of the discussion sessions were ‘Humane Livestock Farming’,



Photographs: Tamara Bergstra

‘The Killing of Animals’, ‘The Wolf in the Netherlands’ and the topic on companion animals ‘Love is Blind’.

A comprehensive report was produced on the webinar, including video playback of the presentations in the plenary session. The [report](#) is available (in Dutch) on the RDA website.



Outlook for 2021

Over the course of 2020 the Council worked on six different issues, five of which stemmed wholly or in part from 'The State of the Animal'. In 2021, the results will become visible in the form of advisory reports and other activities. The Council will also focus on two new subjects.

Work in progress

The killing of animals

The justification, implementation and procedures surrounding the killing of animals differ in each situation. For production animals, the approach is different to that for animals that cause nuisance or companion animals. In its advisory report on this subject, the Council provides an insight into the differences and, where possible, recommendations for policy and legislation.

The position of the wolf

The return of the wolf to the wild in the Netherlands has triggered fierce debate. A huge gulf lies between supporters and opponents. The working group tackling this theme is attempting to gain an insight into the public debate and to suggest ways of bringing parties together.

Love is blind

How the public treat animals in their environment has changed significantly over the last few decades. People love animals, but that can also lead to excesses. The advisory report 'Love is Blind' examines this development in relation to various animal species. What needs to be done to prevent structural problems?

The animal at different levels of government

Local authorities face issues surrounding animal welfare and health. It is not always clear how much scope local administrators have to pursue their own policy. In the topic 'The Animal at Different Levels of Government', the RDA explores the possibilities and challenges.

Humane livestock farming

The Council has previously called for a focus on the welfare of production animals in the transition to circular agriculture. This position is set out in further detail in the advisory report 'Humane Livestock Farming'. What is humane livestock farming, and what can the government do to ensure that this type of farming is practised?

Wildlife rehabilitation

A statutory duty of care applies to wild animals in need of help. However, the implementation of rehabilitation is fragmented and often depends on local voluntary organisations. The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) asked the Council in August 2020 whether and how animals in need should be helped and by whom.

New topics for 2021

Animal Health and Legal Status

There are at least two new subjects on the agenda in 2021: animal health and the legal status of animals. Animal health has become a more pressing issue as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. After all, the coronavirus came



Photograph: iStock Carmen Romero

from animals. What does this mean in terms of how we coexist with animals? A number of other issues remain of current interest, such as antibiotic-resistant infections and endemic diseases related to farming systems.

In thinking about how we treat animals, the role of man is evolving from ruler, via steward, towards a new partnership. We have a growing concern for animal welfare, but that has not yet led to a different legal position.

The Council at work

The Council's approach

The RDA consists of a chair and a maximum of 49 members. Members of the RDA are appointed in a personal capacity by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and serve independently and without any outside influence. The Council issues solicited and unsolicited advisory reports. Reports can be requested by the government or the House of Representatives, also by provinces or civil society organisations – through the relevant ministers or otherwise.

The members of the Council work in science, industry and civil society organisations. This broad composition allows issues to be discussed in a multidisciplinary way, resulting in advisory reports that take into account a wide range of perspectives.

Requests for advice from the RDA are assessed against the following criteria:

1. Does the question relate to animal affairs, specifically animal welfare, animal health and/or ethical issues?
2. Is the necessary expertise insufficiently available within or outside the applicant organisation, or is there a need for independent long-term advice?
3. Does the request for advice require a very broad representation of the social arena?

If these criteria are met, the Council can decide to address an issue either upon request or on its own initiative. A working group is set up with a limited number of Council members to prepare the advisory report. If necessary, the working group is extended to include members of Young RDA or experts from outside the Council.

Following discussion within the Council, an advisory report is issued on a specific subject. All advisory reports are made public, including through publication on the RDA website.

The Council in 2020

The Council started 2020 with 42 members. One member, L. de Ruigh, stepped down because she has joined the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality as Director of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA).

The junior network Young RDA has used this year to position itself as part of the organisation. Young RDA has sixteen members, a number of whom participated in five working groups (see page 20).

The Council received two requests for advice from the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality in 2020. This concerned 'Care of Young Animals' (see page 16) and the rehabilitation of wild animals, on which an advisory report is expected to be published in 2021.

One advisory report was published in 2020: 'Animal Welfare in Circular Agriculture' (page 14). The report on 'Care of Young Animals' was also completed in 2020 and published in early 2021 (page 16). As well as these two reports, a further six topics were still in progress. The full Council met twice in 2020, in June and November. A total of 47 meetings of working groups and subgroups were also held. Most meetings took place online.

The Council also continued its activities for children in 2020. This has taken place in collaboration with the Missing Chapter Foundation for a number of years. Progress was made in 2020 in the development of digital lessons for primary school years 5 to 8. The first of a total of three lessons was published in February 2021, and can be found at <https://youngcrowds.nl/rda/>.

RDA members and their backgrounds

Prof. J.J.M. van Alphen

Animal Ecology
Science

Dr G.B.C. Backus

Agriculture and food
Professional, Policy

J.P. van den Berg

Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals
Professional, Policy

W.T.A.A.G.M. van den Bergh

Funding
Professional, Policy

Prof. I.J.M. de Boer

Animal Production Systems
Science

Dr J.J.L. Candel

Policy
Science, Policy

H.R. Chalmers Hoyneck van Papendrecht

Companion Animals
Professional

Prof. G.M. van Dijk

Policy
Science, Policy

A.G. Dijkhuis

Fauna Management; Spatial Planning
Professional, Policy

Dr N. Endenburg

Human-Animal Relationships, Animal Abuse
Science

Prof. J.W. Erisman

Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Health
Science

Prof. R. Gehring

Veterinary Clinical Pharmacology
Science

D. van Genneep

Rehabilitation of Exotic Animals
Professional, Policy

Prof. M.A.M. Groenen

Genetics
Science

Prof. S. Haring

Philosophy and Computer Science
Science, Professional

Prof. L.A. den Hartog

Animal Feed & Agro-industrial Chains
Science, Professional

A.L. ten Have-Mellema

Pig Farming
Professional, Policy

Prof. J.A.P. Heesterbeek

Farm Animal Health, Animals in Science and Society
Science

G. Hofstra

Policy, Companion Animals
Professional

H. Huijbers

Dairy Farming
Professional

Prof. A. van Huis

Entomology
Science

Prof. B. Kemp

Animal Physiology, Animal Behaviour and Animal Husbandry
Science

A.P.M. Kemps

Welfare of Production Animals
Professional

Dr L.J.A. Lipman

Veterinary Public Health
Science

Dr F.L.B. Meijboom

Animal Ethics
Science

F.E. Rietkerk

Zoo Animals
Professional, Policy

C.W. Ripmeester

Legal Affairs
Policy

Prof. T.B. Rodenburg

Animal Welfare
Science

L. de Ruigh until September 2020

Zoo Animals, Farm Animals
Professional, Policy

Dr M.C.Th. Scholten

Aquaculture and the Fishing Industry, Research Strategy
Science, Policy

Prof. Y.H. Schukken

Animal Health
Science

G.C. Six

Hobby Animals
Professional

M. Slob

Essayist and Philosopher
Policy

Prof. G.R. de Snoo

Non-captive Animals
Science, Policy

J. Staman

Chair
Policy

Dr J.W.G.M. Swinkels

Sustainable Livestock Farming Chains
Policy, Professional

R.A. Tombrock

International Animal Protection & Animal Welfare Policy

Prof. J.C.M. van Trijp

Market Science, Consumer Behaviour
Science

Dr H.A.P. Urlings

Food Safety, Product Integrity
Science, Professional

Dr J.B.F. van der Valk

Test Animals
Science, Policy

J. van de Ven

Goat Farming, Healthy Animals
Professional, Policy

F.A.L.M. Verstappen

Companion Animals, Birds
Professional

Members of Young RDA

K. Bos, MSc

A. Danklof, MSc

D.M. Eppink, DVM MSc

M.A.A.M. van Gerwen, MSc

J.L.T. Heerkens, PhD

Ir. S. van der Hoeven

Ing. F. Kooter

L. Mulder, LL.M

P. Paulussen, MSc

S. Ruesink, BBA

R.S. Sikkema, MSc

W.M. Smit, MA

S.H. Snaas-Alders, MSc

L.M. Stadig, PhD

S. van der Steen, PhD

D.J. Vink, MSc

Personnel & organisation

The RDA team supports the Council and working group activities and is the daily point of contact for the members and all other interested parties. In 2020, the team consisted of:

M.H.W. (Marc) Schakenraad

Secretary

Dr T.J. (Tamara) Bergstra

Deputy Secretary

A.E. (Anne) van den Ende, MSc MA

Deputy Secretary

D. (Daniëlle) Hartman, MSc

Deputy Secretary

Dr K. (Kirsten) van Hees

Deputy Secretary

D. (Daan) de Neef

Deputy Secretary for Communications, from 15 March 2020

R.L. (Rosanne) van Oudheusden, MSc BA

Deputy Secretary

R. (Ruud) Pothoven

Deputy Secretary

E. (Ellen) Stil-Vlok

Management Support until 1 June 2020

A.E.H. (Sandra) Veeren

Management Support from 17 August 2020



Photograph: BuitenBeeld

