



COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK
FOR PRODUCTION ANIMALS

SUMMARY

Aims and activities of the Council

The Council on Animal Affairs (*Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden* – RDA) is an independent council of experts that gives the Minister for Agriculture solicited and unsolicited advice on multidisciplinary issues in the field of animal welfare and health. The Council on Animal Affairs currently comprises around 40 members with very different backgrounds and expertise, who serve in a personal capacity, are independent and not bound by any instructions.

The Council on Animal Affairs deals with issues across the spectrum of public policy on animals: relating to farmed animals and non-farmed animals, in other words those that ‘live in the wild’, to hobby farm animals, to companion animals and to production and laboratory animals.

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.

Foreword

According to the law, the ‘No, unless’ principle applies to keeping production animals in the Netherlands: it is prohibited, unless the Minister for Agriculture makes an exception.

Frameworks and standards for keeping production animals are set out in legislation and the Netherlands maintains a list of animals for which an exception has been made; animals on the list may be kept for production purposes.

In the past, proposals have been submitted to add animal species to this list on more than one occasion. The responsible bodies, including the Council on Animal Affairs, have developed and applied specific assessment frameworks for those cases. As a result, the need arose for a single assessment framework which can be used, irrespective of the relevant animal species, to substantiate decisions on inclusion in, or subsequent deletion from the list. At the request of the Minister for Agriculture, the Council on Animal Affairs has developed a single assessment framework which is presented in this advisory report.

The Council places high importance on transparency and a wide distribution of the results of its work. A citizens’ summary has therefore been published together with the full advisory report on this topic.

The Hague, March 2016



*Marc Schakenraad,
Secretary to the Council*

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RAAD VOOR DIERENAANGELEGENHEDEN

Assessment Framework for Production Animals

An Advisory Report requested by the Minister for Agriculture

Question: Can an assessment framework be created for all animal species which can be used to formulate an informed opinion on whether they may be kept for production purposes? The basic premise of the Animals Act (*Wet dieren*) is ‘No, unless’, that is to say unless the legislature decides that it is permitted. The relevant animal species will in that case be included in the list of authorised production animals. The assessment framework aims to offer the government a tool to help perform the necessary assessment in a comprehensive and transparent manner.

Background: ‘The Netherlands does not yet have a clear methodology for assessing whether an animal species can be used as a production animal’, explains Hans Hopster, chair of the forum responsible for preparing this advisory report on behalf of the Council. In everyday life, he is a lecturer in Animal Welfare at the Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences and a senior researcher in Animal Welfare for the Animals Sciences Group at Wageningen University and Research Centre. ‘There has been considerable discussion from the outset about the automatic inclusion of production animals on the list even though it has not been ruled out that specific husbandry regulations are also needed for these animal species. The Council has previously developed assessment frameworks for insects, fish and the dromedary. Moreover, new applications are submitted from time to time for animals that have not previously been included



Photograph: René Verleg

Hans Hopster

in the list. This underlines the importance of using a methodology which is the same not for just one or two, but for all animal species.’

The outcome of the assessment clearly does not need to be the same, explains Hopster, as this depends on the use or function of the animal and the information included in the assessment. The outcome may differ for a rabbit depending on whether it is a companion, production or laboratory animal. ‘However, the same methodology must always be applied to the assessment to ensure that all the relevant questions are asked and the outcome can be explained under all circumstances.’

Considerations: ‘Assessing the question whether an animal should be included in the list of authorised production animals should be a two-step process’, says Hopster. ‘The first thing you should look at is whether the animal is suitable to be kept by humans without any problem. Should this be the case, the next step is to look at whether this also applies to “keeping the animal for production purposes”. Generally speaking, quite different circumstances obviously apply, including the animal keeper’s economic incentives.’ To perform the actual assessment for production animals, the assessment

framework should be used that was developed during the preparation of previous RDA advisory reports, the latest and most articulated form of which was published in the advisory report on ‘One Health’. Hopster: ‘The framework in turn takes the relevant values in the “human”, “animal” and “ecosystem” domains into account. This includes the three dimensions of sustainable production: people, profit and planet.’

Recommendation: The assessment framework presented in this advisory report should be used to answer the question whether animal species should be included in the list of authorised production animals. The suitability of keeping the animal species should first be assessed, before assessing its suitability for production purposes. Any new exemptions should be granted on an individual and provisional basis subject to conditions. This will provide useful input for the animal husbandry conditions that will later be attached to inclusion in the list. Record the findings in a file and ensure disclosure of the considerations that were taken into account in making a decision. This assessment should also be performed for animals which already have a long history as production animals.



Brief summary of content

Further to a request from the Minister for Agriculture, the Council on Animal Affairs developed an assessment framework for all animal species to be kept for production purposes. The Council places a high value on transparent and coherent policy considerations.

The Council previously issued advisory reports on new fish species to be used in fish farming (2002) and on the dromedary as a production animal (2006). This new assessment framework enables a comprehensive and coherent assessment to be made concerning whether it is acceptable to keep an animal species as a production animal. This is based on facts, analyses and values in line with the One Health approach.



Photograph: Twan Wiermans

Pigs are included in the list of authorised production animals. However, they have not been assessed on the basis of an assessment framework as set out in this advisory report.

In essence, the choice of adding an animal species to, or deleting it from the list of authorised production animals is a normative choice.

As soon as a concrete application has been submitted, the interests of humans, animals and the ecosystem will need to be weighed against each other.

The Animals Act (*Wet dieren*) prohibits animals to be kept for production purposes unless the animal species is listed in Appendix II of the Animal Husbandry Decree (*Besluit houders van dieren*). Specific animal husbandry regulations for production animals may also be incorporated in the Decree. Furthermore, it is possible under the Act to apply an individual exemption for keeping a certain animal species.

This means that three situations are possible for production animals:

- a) An applicant submits a request for an individual exemption for keeping a certain animal species for production purposes;
- b) An applicant submits a request to add an animal species to Appendix II of the Decree;
- c) An applicant submits a request to delete an animal species from Appendix II of the Decree.

The assessment framework presented in this advisory report can be applied to any of these situations, although the arguments may differ. The framework can also be used for animal species that produce different types of products or services. It would be advisable to evaluate the framework regularly to keep it current.



Black Soldier Fly larvae can accelerate the composting process of organic materials. In early 2015 a provisional exemption was granted for using the fly for production purposes.

The assessment framework is structured as follows:

Step 1: Gathering information

Information should be gathered on the consequences of keeping the animal species for production purposes based on animal, human and ecosystem-related aspects. This is factual information about the animal species and the envisaged husbandry conditions, plus the economic, commercial, ecological and public health aspects.

Step 2: Analysis

Based on the factual information collected under step 1, the potential constraints for the animal's welfare, including its health, are analysed. Furthermore, the potential risks for public health and the ecosystem are assessed. Lastly, the measures the applicant plans to take to minimise the risk of potential constraints are examined.

Step 3: Arguments and assessment

The various arguments for authorising or, conversely, refusing an animal species as a production animal are set out and linked to the values described in the RDA's advisory report on One Health. This serves as a basis for deciding which arguments are deemed decisive in authorising or, conversely, refusing an animal species.

The Council has set out the following guiding principles and recommendations for using the assessment framework:

1. Establish a link between the list of authorised pets (*'huisdierenlijst'*) and the list of authorised production animals (*'productiedierenlijst'*). In order to answer the question 'can this animal species be kept for production purposes?', the primary question 'can this animal species be kept?' must first be answered in the affirmative.
2. Should there be multiple, fundamentally different husbandry systems or production objectives for an animal species, the Council recommends that each system or objective be separately assessed.
3. In authorising a production animal which has not previously been used for that purpose in the Netherlands, the Council recommends that this always initially be carried out – after a comprehensive assessment – on the basis of individual exemptions. Husbandry conditions must be attached to exemptions to safeguard the animals' welfare. Moreover, conditions can be imposed to register additional animal-related data (output parameters) for the purpose of any follow-up assessments.
4. The addition of an animal species to the list of authorised production animals should always be coupled with specific animal husbandry regulations which are embedded in the designated Decree. Where this is not yet the case for the currently designated animal species, the Council recommends that specific animal husbandry regulations for these animals be subsequently incorporated.
5. Facilitate reassessment applications for animal species designated for production purposes. In this regard, stability must be ensured by applying at least a five-year validity period to the conclusion of an assessment or reassessment.



Photograph: iBen Seelt, laatzeelandzien.nl

'Sole from Zeeland' pilot project for the commercial farming of sole at Colijnsplaat.

6. Apply the assessment framework not only to the production animals defined in the Decree, but also to animal species that produce different types of products or services for commercial purposes.
7. Assess all animal species listed in Appendix II of the Decree with the aid of this assessment framework and record the findings in file.

8. Ensure that the facts, analyses and values, based on which a decision is taken on whether or not to keep an animal for production purposes, are clear and comprehensible.

In conclusion, the Council wishes to point out that the assessment framework can be adjusted in line with new insights based on the availability of newly acquired knowledge and experience.

Quails are kept as production animals in France. In the Netherlands, quails are not included in the list of authorised production animals.



Photograph: ANP Foto

Appendix

Contributors to this advisory report

This advisory report is a product of the full Council on Animal Affairs. The report was prepared by Council members H.M. van Veen and Prof. L.J. Hellebrekers, with Dr H. Hopster acting as chair. M.W. Oonk served as secretary to the forum.

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