



COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS
HORSE MARKETS IN THE NETHERLANDS
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 35 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

Horse markets are a familiar sight in many regions across the Netherlands. Over the past few years, however, there has been growing social resistance to these markets. This is due in part to incidental breaches of the welfare standards under the Animals Act (*Wet Dieren*) and the Animal Keepers Decree (*Besluit houders van dieren*), and partly to concerns about the effects on horse welfare in general.

The Dutch Minister for Agriculture therefore asked the Council on Animal Affairs (*Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden*, RDA) to issue an advisory report on horse markets. The Minister asked for supporting material for his intention to segregate horse markets from ‘stressful events’, as well as for ways to lower the risk of incidents. He also requested consultation with municipal authorities, to determine how the recommended measures can be implemented as part of local permit policy.

This citizens’ summary presents a condensed version of the first section of the requested advisory report. The published report now forms the basis for consultations to be held between municipal authorities and the organisers of the major horse markets. The complete report is available on the RDA website.

The Hague, March 2017



Marc Schakenraad, Secretary

COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS

HORSE MARKETS IN THE NETHERLANDS
FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

SUMMARY



RAAD VOOR DIERENAANGELEGENHEDEN

Horse Markets in the Netherlands

An Advisory Report requested by the Minister for Agriculture

Question: From a welfare perspective, what are the problem areas at the 100 or so horse markets in the Netherlands? What options exist to realise improvement in these areas, and is the segregation of horse markets and stressful public events necessary or useful in this respect?

Motivation: Hetty van Beers, chair of the panel that prepared this advisory report, says: ‘Society has concerns regarding the welfare of horses at horse markets. Current horse markets are often combined with other events, such as carnivals or shows. This is why the Minister asked the Council to prepare an advisory report on horse markets.’ In her day-to-day life, Van Beers is director of the Netherlands Veterinary Medicines Authority. ‘Those for and against horse markets have their own ideas and motives, leading to a risk that positions harden and an undesirable situation for everybody arises.’ Van Beers continues: ‘The purpose of this report is to clarify the key issues that affect horse welfare at markets, and how that welfare can be assured.’

Considerations: There is a wide variety of horse markets in the Netherlands. Van Beers explains: ‘It was therefore impossible to create a one-size-fits-all proposal for all markets. The Council took the welfare of horses as the starting point, and formulated regulations for



Photograph: Hans Roggen

Forum chair Hetty van Beers

ensuring it is maintained. We then looked at which aspects are already regulated and which are not, showing us where the existing Horse Market Welfare Protocol needs to be further developed. This produced proposals for tightening and expanding the Protocol, and to measures that lie more within the mandate of national and local government authorities.'

Recommendation: 'We concluded that a blanket ban on horse markets and segregation from public events is not necessary,' Van Beers states. 'Provided, however, that the market organisations and the horse owners satisfy the conditions listed in the advisory report.' This is currently far from always the case. The report includes a table of parameters that can be used to assess the state of an animal's welfare, and another listing the environmental risk factors that can affect welfare. These parameters can serve as the building blocks for a new

protocol. Incidentally, the Council was (and is) itself not involved in drawing up this protocol. Van Beers continues: 'If we in the Netherlands believe that we should be able to keep and trade horses (and the latter at horse markets), then welfare criteria are needed. Provided these criteria are met, there can be no objection to horse markets, not even those coupled with other public events.' Van Beers adds that the welfare criteria also apply to the journeys to and from the markets, which are often longer than is good for the animals. Horses destined for slaughter are often transported across vast distances afterwards, even passing other abattoirs along the way. Lastly, Van Beers stresses, the report contains a piece of advice for keepers and traders: 'The people at the market are what *make* the market. They are the ones who determine the market conditions, and must keep public perception thereof in mind.'



Brief summary of content

The Minister for Agriculture asked the Council on Animal Affairs to issue an advisory report on horse markets. The Minister's request focused on two points: firstly, the desire to segregate horse markets from stressful events so as to prevent discomfort (stress), and secondly, ways to prevent incidents. In order to give adequate treatment to these aspects, the Council expanded the scope of the request to include ways to ensure the general welfare of market horses. Because transport to and from the market is an integral part of the market process, this aspect was also included.

In drawing up this advisory report, the Council sourced information from organisers of horse markets, veterinarians, municipal authorities, livestock traders and civil society organisations, as well as from current

scientific research on equine welfare, both from the literature and specialists in the field.

The Council focused first of all on the factors that influence a horse's sense of well-being, including individual characteristics of the animal itself and environmental factors. The former category includes aspects such as breed, age, individual history, character and health. The second includes factors such as accommodation, nutrition and how the animals are treated by carers and others. Eleven parameters are listed that can be measured or identified in animals that give a good indication of a horse's well-being at any given time. As such assessments are made in public spaces or during transport, the only factors included are those evident in the horse's appearance (either physical or behavioural) to a person with knowledge and experience. Also included are twenty-two environmental risk factors that can adversely affect a horse's well-being either at a market or during transport. Evaluating the relevance of these factors requires no (or less-specific) knowledge of horses.

The Council has determined that horse husbandry (and with it, horse trading) is embedded in Dutch culture. Many sales channels exist; markets form one such channel, that is often combined with other social events.



Photograph: RDA

Horse markets are often combined with other events



In addition to horses, horse markets are also frequented by lots of people



Photograph: RDA

The market organisers must provide water sources and buckets



Photograph: RDA

Animals must be tethered in a manner safe for both the animals and the surroundings. Borders made of netting can lead to injury, for example.

The Council has concluded that markets form an acceptable avenue for trade in today's society, provided that the horses' welfare is not compromised either at the market itself or during transport. This can be attained using the recommendations given in this document. As long as these conditions are met, there is no need for horse markets to be segregated from other public events, as the animals will then be protected from the potential discomfort that such events can cause.

To this end, the Council has formulated the following recommendations:

1. Further tightening and expansion of the Horse Market Welfare Protocol
2. Setting professional competence standards for inspectors
3. Adequate knowledge among owners on handling and caring for horses
4. Monitoring the identities of horses and owners upon entry to markets

5. More stringent supervision and enforcement (legislation), and inclusion of the Horse Market Welfare Protocol in general municipal by-laws.
6. Drawing up a welfare assessment for use by competent authorities
7. Increasing transparency at horse markets
8. Communicating with/informing all stakeholders via appropriate channels, and explaining the underlying reasoning behind agreements and regulations

9. Clear definitions and interpretation of legislation
10. Supplementary requirements applicable to long journeys.

The above recommendations are not just about drawing up and enforcing regulations. Animal owners and market organisers retain ultimate responsibility for animal welfare. The supervision and assessment of whether their welfare is adequately provided for must be entrusted to a third party. Welfare at horse markets



An important aspect of welfare of horses is transport and the loading and unloading of the animals

must also include the transport, loading and unloading of the horses. Potential long journeys to and from horse markets constitute a key welfare risk. The Council advises taking additional measures to prevent long journeys to and from markets. For horses, the time spent at a market is not a restful one.

Lastly, the people at the market are what make the market, and are instrumental in forming its image. All parties are therefore expected to keep this in mind, and act accordingly.



Photograph: RDA

Horses must be provided with non-slippery surfaces, and adequate roughage

Appendix

Parties involved in the preparation of this advisory report

This advisory report is a product of the full RDA. It was prepared by a panel consisting of council members Hetty van Beers (chair), Marianne Sloet, Joost de Jongh and Helga van Veen, supported by Monique van der Gaag, Maartje Oonk and Marc Schakenraad from the RDA agency. At the panel's request, Kathalijne Visser contributed supporting material for the relevant horse welfare aspects.

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