



COUNCIL ON ANIMAL AFFAIRS

ENJOYABLE FOR
HUMANS AND ANIMALS?

THE USE OF ANIMALS IN SPORT, RECREATION, TRADITION & ENTERTAINMENT

SUMMARY

The purpose and activities of the Council

The Council on Animal Affairs (Raad voor Dierenangelegenheden, RDA) is an independent council of experts, which advises the Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food quality of the Netherlands. This advice is submitted on request and by the Council's own initiative regarding complex, multidisciplinary issues relating to animal health and welfare. The RDA currently comprises some forty experts with a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, who serve on the Council in a personal capacity, independently and without any outside influence. The Council on Animal Affairs considers issues across the entire spectrum of animal policy: on captive ("domesticated") and non-captive ("wild") animals, smallholding, or hobby farm animals, companion animals (pets), commercially raised animals and laboratory animals. The Council records the conclusions of its deliberations in advisory reports. These documents provide an overview of the scientific and societal background to various issues, and include recommendations on policy options and avenues for resolving potential problems. Consensus is not a requirement for the inclusion of opinions; an opinion may contain views held by a minority of Council members.

Preface

Sports, games and events involving animals play an important role in our society. From equestrian sport and pigeon racing; from pedigree exhibitions and raptor shows to traditions such as live nativity scenes or the Kallemooi rooster. For many people who practise or observe these activities, they are the ultimate form of recreation and/or part of their identity, for many businesses they are a source of income.

They are also subject to criticism. This is because recent decades have seen a shift in the way people view the treatment of animals, as we illustrated in our publication *State of the Animal* (2019). Ever more Dutch people consider animals to have a moral right to a good life, and violations of their welfare are no longer generally acceptable.

We see that people who are involved in sports and recreational activities involving animals cherish these activities and sometimes have a very intimate bond with their animal. In a number of cases, this has already led to structural measures to ensure animal welfare. However, the differences are great.

It is the Council's view that the interest of the animal must always be paramount. The question this raises is: how do you determine the interest of the animal? In respect of livestock farming, we

introduced the concept of 'humaneness' (Humane Livestock Farming advisory report, 2021) and formulated six guiding principles underpinning this. We have now also elaborated these principles for sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment. One of our recommendations is that a start must be made at drawing up and implementing animal welfare plans based on these guiding principles. This will allow those involved to tackle the improvement of animal welfare in a transparent matter, one step at a time.

We find that sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment involving animals should provide pleasure for humans and animals, and we hope that this report will contribute towards making these activities more sustainable.

This publication is an abridged version of the advisory report. The complete report is available on the RDA website.

The Hague, April 2023



Jan Staman, Chair



Marc Schakenraad, Secretary to the Council

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Interview with forum chair Ruud Tombrock

‘The use of animals for entertainment is no longer self-evident’

Sports, events and traditions involving animals have been part of society from time immemorial. The position and welfare of animals have been receiving more attention in recent years, but there is certainly room for improvement. In the ‘Enjoyable for humans and animals?’ advisory report, the Council on Animal Affairs makes a number of recommendations. “While there certainly is increasing focus on animal welfare, we want to accelerate this process.”

The Council drew up the report at its own initiative. The subject follows on from the Council study State of the Animal (2019), which illustrated that the way we see animals and our interaction with them is changing. People feel that animals deserve a good life, free from unnecessary pain or stress. “This also has consequences for activities involving the use of animals for sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment. The Council on Animal Affairs is of the opinion that it should voice its view about this”, says Ruud Tombrock, Executive Director for Europe at the animal welfare organisation Humane Society International. He chairs the forum that prepared the report.

What approach did the forum take? “We started by identifying the activities that resort under this subject. There’s a great number, and a great variety, of activities – from pigeon racing to fishing contests, to the Kallemooi festival rooster and live nativity scenes. De central theme is entertainment; animals are used for purposes of human recreation. We then researched scientific literature on these subjects. Additionally, we had discussions with a number of organisations, such as the Dutch homing pigeon holders association (Duivensportbond), the

Horse Sector Council (Sectorraad Paarden) and the Dutch recreational fishing association (Sportvisserij Nederland).

A change is under way

What is the picture that emerged? “We very soon came to the conclusion that lots of activities have been taking place year in, year out without much debate on or even, more importantly, attention paid to the welfare of the animals involved. A change is under way, though; increasingly, questions are being asked”, the forum chair reports. “Attention to animal welfare is increasing, although in certain sectors it could use an additional push. Differences between the various sectors are enormous. There are activities in which the care, health and welfare of animals receive a lot of attention, such as certain equestrian sports events. On the other hand, there are events or activities that hardly consider these aspects.”

Guiding principles

The question is: how do you act in the animals’ best interests? To address this, the Council has drawn up a number of ‘guiding principles’. As Tombrock explains, “The Council on Animal Affairs had previously published a report that set guiding principles to ensure humane livestock farming. We have now applied these to animals that are used for entertainment purposes.”

These principles underlie one of the most important recommendations. Tombrock continues, “We advise anyone who offers or organises an activity involving animals to draw up an animal welfare plan; in the first instance this would be the sector organisations. The principles regarding humaneness can

serve as a guideline. If the activities cannot be reconciled with these principles, how and where the activities can be modified must be looked into. If the situation remains problematic, this might in time lead to the phasing out of the activity.”

Another recommendation is collecting knowledge and making this accessible. “We think that many organisers of events involving animals are quite willing to introduce improvements, but that they do not understand the impact of activities on the welfare of the animals well enough. This information must be shared and made accessible to anyone who organises an event involving animals.”

Powers of the authorities

The Council also advises that the powers of local authorities be expanded. “When considering an application for an event permit, formally municipalities can only weigh applications on issues such as public order and safety. They cannot refuse to grant a permit for reasons of animal welfare. Yet we know that municipalities are grappling with this aspect. We noted this previously in the ‘Animals in the House of Thorbecke’ advisory report. Our current stance is: it would be a good thing if municipalities were given the option of saying ‘no’ to an event if the suffering of animals is disproportionate to the pleasure of people.”

Not abolished right away

In its report, the Council does not say that certain forms of sport or entertainment involving animals need to be abolished right away. Why not? “All of the sport and recreational activities involving animals represent an enormous sector of society, counting a few million practitioners and innumerable organisations and people that earn a living from them. Making changes here will take time. Fortunately, we are definitely seeing improvements in certain sectors and growing care for the welfare of the animals involved. We would like to accelerate this process and also get it going in other sectors.”

“The first step is: concentrate on animals and on the debate, and make plans for improvement. Thereafter, examine what this has actually achieved. There must be consequences to people not being prepared to make changes to an activity even once you have illustrated that the suffering of the animal is considerable. In cases like these you must say: ‘we do not think that this activity can continue in its current form’. However, this point is the end of an extended process.”

Impact on the animal

Tombrock is reluctant to judge; what he wants to do is call on people to consider the impact of their activity on the animal. “I think that many people are okay with an animal briefly experiencing a bit of stress due to an activity if this means that many people will experience fun or relaxation from it. Take cow hugging at a farm, for example. At the other end of the spectrum you have activities that involve great suffering for the animal. An extreme example of this is bull fights, which almost every Dutch person considers to be undesirable. We can achieve more if we get people to actively ask themselves: what can we do to better ensure the welfare of the animals in question so that the negative effects of the activity are reduced and are more proportionate to the pleasure that people experience from it. This report offers certain guidelines in this regard. We look forward to entering into discussions with the relevant sectors on how to proceed further.”



Forum chair Ruud Tombrock.

Photo: RDA

Brief summary of the advisory report

Introduction

Animals have been used in sports, games, traditions, festivities, events and other activities for centuries. For many people, these human-animal activities are an important part of their identity; for some, they are their primary source of income and for others, they represent the ultimate form of recreation or engaging in sport. Moreover, some of these activities are anchored in centuries-old traditions. Although people still hold varying views with regard to animals, and opinions in

this regard may diverge considerably, society today seems to feel a greater involvement with the fortunes of animals. Violations of animal welfare are increasingly regarded to be unacceptable. Given this development, activities with animals are (once again) being reassessed. In this report, the Council on Animal Affairs investigates the consequences of this change in the relationship between humans and animals for the use of animals in sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment.



Photo: David Royden Rishworth / Shutterstock

Release of pigeons for a race

In 2021, the Council introduced the concept of ‘humaneness’ in livestock farming. As the Council sees it, humaneness signifies recognition of the intrinsic value of the animal, and ensuring basic necessities and quality of life. Using the six guiding principles of humaneness, based on scientific insights, a situation can be created in which animals can achieve a positive mental state. In this report, the Council applies these principles to animals used in sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment; and therefore the main question is: What implications do the guiding principles regarding humaneness have for animals used in sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment?

Outline of the situation in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there is a great variety of sports, games, traditions, festivities, events and other activities that involve animals. These range from raptor shows and living nativity scenes to pig tapping (zwientie tikken) and pigeon racing. These activities are, among others, organised and/or practised by associations or clubs, private individuals, businesses and local or other communities. While these activities may be very diverse, often their primary objective is to provide humans with fun and relaxation. But what actually is the problem?

The extent of the research done into and literature on animal welfare differs from one human-animal activity to the next. We do know that certain activities can also have positive effects on animals and can be an enrichment of their lives. However, there are many other activities where the likelihood of the animals experiencing positive effects from the activity to which they are exposed is questionable. Where things get problematic is when the activity has negative effects on the welfare of the animal but there are substantial human interests (commerce, prestige, entertainment) as well.

The guiding principles regarding animals used in sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment

The Council has worked out the six guiding principles drawn up for humane livestock farming for application in respect of animals in sport and recreation.

Recognition of the animal's intrinsic value and integrity

The Council defines intrinsic value as follows:

‘The term intrinsic value refers to the value inherent in an animal, irrespective of its utility. Respecting this inherent value means factoring in the interests of animals in all decisions that affect them. Specifically, there is a moral obligation for human intervention not to cause structural or serious damage to the welfare, health or integrity of animals or their habitat’ – RDA Conceptual Framework.

It is the Council’s view that this weighing should be adhered to not only by the government, but also by the sector in all phases of sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment.

In concrete terms, this would have the following implications.

- The animal must be treated with respect at all times.
- The activity and everything concerning it must suit the species, its nature and the individual animal.
- The activity and everything concerning it may not violate the integrity (wholeness) of the animal.

Good feeding

- The animal must have adequate amounts of water and nutrients, suited to its species-specific and natural needs.

Good housing

- Exposure to stimuli experienced as negative by the animal should be limited to a minimum.
- The animal must have access to suitable environmental conditions to give it sufficient space to exercise naturally and have enough fresh air.

Good health

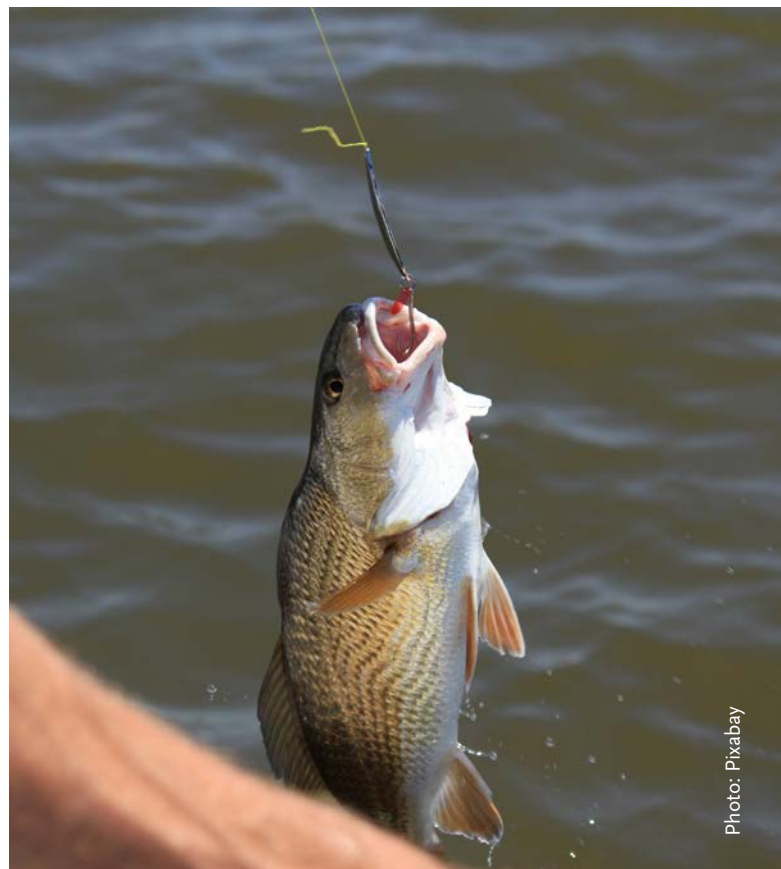
- The animal taking part in the activity must be physically able to perform the activity.
- The lifespan of the animal may not be reduced by the activity and everything concerning it.
- For activities that hold an increased risk of harm or stress, it is important to organise professional supervision so that the activity can be interrupted if necessary and proper care is available to the animal.

Natural behaviour (and interactions)

- The animal must have the freedom to discontinue the physical activity or training without this having unpleasant consequences.
- The animal should be able to withdraw from environmental stimuli that it experiences as negative.
- The animal may not be exposed to enforced changes to its social environment that could result in a violation of the welfare of the animal.
- The animal must only be exposed to training methods and devices that the animal experiences as neutral or positive.
- The persons who are in direct contact with the animal must have the proper knowledge, expertise and attitude with regard to the animal.

Positive mental state

- If the animal is able to respond to changes in its social and physical environment it can achieve a state that it experiences as predominantly positive ('A life worth living'). Such a state will result if all the guiding principles mentioned above are adhered to.



Fishing

Photo: Pixabay



Photo: Solar 76oL Foto / Shutterstock

Small animal show

Conclusion and recommendations

It appears that detrimental consequences for animals are no longer seen as a matter of course in our society. The Council is of the opinion that six guiding principles need to be adhered to if animals are exposed to activities in the fields of sport, recreation, tradition or entertainment. This is necessary for realising humane use of these animals. If the activities cannot be reconciled with the guiding principles, how and where the activities can be modified must be looked into. This might result in some activities not being able to continue in their current form and therefore having to be modified or even perhaps discontinued. What the Council wants is a future in which sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment are enjoyable for humans and animals. The Council considers it important that the interest of the animal is always prioritised, so that in the future animals are only used for activities in which they are able to achieve positive welfare, and to this end it makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations to the sector

The Council advises sector organisations to chart the impact of their activities on animals, to investigate the problem areas and subsequently draw up an animal welfare plan based on the guiding principles presented in this advisory report. The Council considers it very important that the animal welfare plans are then applied broadly in the sector and, to this end, it appeals to the self-regulating ability of the sectors in question. The Council advises associations within the sector to then draw up practical rules for their associations (in the form of articles of association or regulations, for example) to properly anchor their animal welfare plan in the association's practices.

In the Council's view, activities that are in not in any way compatible with the guiding principles should in time be phased out. The three Rs (3Rs) might serve as a guideline in this gradual transition in order to bring about improvement in animal welfare within a relatively short term. The 3Rs are Replacement, Reduction and Refinement. De drie V's staan voor Vervanging, Vermindering en Verfijning.



Photo: AB Photographie / Shutterstock

Raptor shows involve the use of wild animals for entertainment.

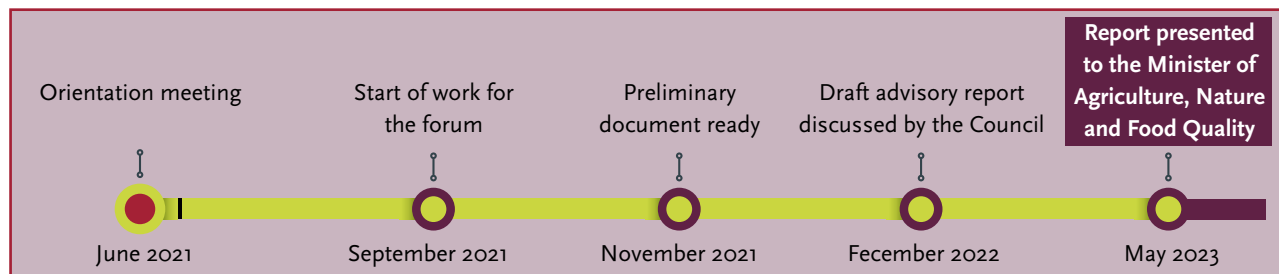
Recommendations to the sector

The RDA makes the following recommendations to the Minister:

- Introduce an obligation to register for all organisations inside and outside sector organisations that offer or organise activities that make use of animals in the fields of sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment.
- Keep actively promoting the self-regulating ability of the sectors by stimulating the development of animal welfare plans.
- Give municipalities the authority to set conditions regarding animal welfare in respect of event permits, such as those recommended in the Council's advisory report 'Animals in the House of Thorbecke' (Dieren in het huis van Thorbecke).

Recommendations to knowledge institutes

To support the public debate, the Council recommends that research institutions further develop knowledge about animals in sport, recreation, tradition and entertainment. The Council notes that the available literature is fragmented and at times hard to find. A (virtual) knowledge centre would be able to collect, update and make the findings of national and international scientific research on each activity available, and serve as a source of consultation for sector organisations and others.



Annex

Composition of the forum and the Council

Forum

This advisory report from the Council on Animal Affairs (RDA) was prepared by a forum of Council members comprising Drs R.A. (Ruud) Tombrock (chair), W.T.A.A.G.M. (Ted) van den Berg, Prof. T.B. (Bas) Rodenburg, Drs J. (Jan) Staman, Dr N. (Nienke) Endenburg, Drs G. (Gerrit) Hofstra, Dr L.J.A. (Len) Lipman, Drs F. (Frank) Verstappen and P. (Priscilla) Paulussen (Junior Network).

The Secretary-Director Ir M.H.W. Schakenraad and the committee secretaries Dr T.J. (Tamara) Bergstra (until March 2022), D. (Daniëlle) Hartman MSc (as from March 2022) and L. (Luca) Stolze MSc of the RDA staff office supported the activities of the forum.

The draft advisory report was submitted to the Council and to the Junior Network for assessment. As such, the report is a product of the Council as a whole.

Sheep and other domestic farm animals appear in living nativity scenes.





Photo: Pixabay

Dog race.

As of 1 April 2023, the Council had the following members:

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The Council Secretary is M.H.W. Schakenraad MSc.



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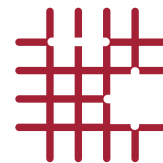
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