

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Interim government response to the consultation on the reform of farm animal welfare codes

April 2014

Contents

Background.....	1
Overview of responses	2
Outcome of the consultation	2
Piloting guidance.....	3
Annex A: List of respondents	4

Background

1. A consultation on the reform of the farm animal welfare codes was published on 27 June 2013 and ran for 6 weeks until 8 August 2013.
2. The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of all those interested in farm animal welfare, whether they are involved in keeping animals for farming purposes or have an interest as citizens or consumers, on a proposal to reform the existing system of guidance to farmers on how to comply with animal welfare legislation.
3. The consultation focused on the principle of moving from statutory farm animal welfare codes to industry-led drafted, non-statutory guidance. The consultation aimed to check whether the preferred option meets both the Government's commitment to improved standards of animal welfare and the practical needs of farmers. The objective of the proposal was to ensure that guidance to keepers on how to comply with farm animal welfare legislation reflects both the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge and is presented in the most relevant way for animal keepers.
4. The proposal for reform outlined in the consultation related solely to farm animal welfare codes and did not include welfare codes for game birds or companion animals.
5. The Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish Governments issue their own farm animal welfare codes and the proposal outlined in the consultation related solely to English farm animal welfare codes.

Overview of responses

6. In total we received 46 responses. Of these, two clarified that their organisations would not be providing comments on the consultation and two supported other respondents' comments. Therefore, comments from 44 respondents were analysed and a summary of their affiliations can be found in Table 1. A full list of the organisations who responded to the consultation can be found in Annex A.

Table 1 The number of respondents from different sectors.

Affiliation of respondents	Number
Enforcement	4
Charity	8
Research and Education	5
Livestock sector	14
Veterinary profession	8
Member of the public	3
Expert Committee	2

Outcome of the consultation

7. A detailed summary of responses will be published later this year; this interim Government response is intended to offer transparency to respondents on why we are taking longer and having more detailed deliberations than anticipated following the end of the consultation.
8. The consultation responses did not provide a consensus of views. Whilst some industry groups were enthusiastic to develop a partnership approach to drafting guidance, others remain to be convinced that this was an appropriate way forward. Some welfare charities have also sought assurances that moving to non statutory guidance will in no way impact on the current level of welfare for farm animals.
9. The Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE) has been instrumental in the development of the proposal to reform farm animal welfare codes and it remains fully supportive of the proposed approach. However, Defra and AHWBE

acknowledge that there is work still to be done to achieve buy-in from the whole of the livestock industry before we can decide if the proposed approach could work in practice. Defra and AHWBE will talk with industry groups to try and build a common understanding of partnership working in the production of jointly owned guidance, being mindful of the varying resource capacity of the different livestock sectors and the need for robust quality assurance of guidance to ensure that animal welfare standards are not weakened. Defra will also prepare a cost/benefit analysis of producing jointly owned guidance.

10. There was broad agreement from consultation respondents that FAWC should quality assure the guidance. FAWC has agreed in principle to take on this role but is concerned about resource implications for the Committee and whether they will have the necessary expertise.
11. Due to the wide range of views on reforming farm animal welfare codes, deliberations by Defra and the AHWBE have taken longer than expected and will continue over the Spring and Summer. A final decision on the Government's proposal to reform farm animal welfare codes will be published later this year.
12. In the meantime, AHWBE members will work with officials, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee and all interested stakeholders to identify the best way of delivering reformed farm animal welfare guidance within existing resources.

Piloting guidance

13. The animal welfare team has worked with the British Poultry Council and together are piloting the new approach to guidance. We are in the final stages of jointly drafting meat chicken welfare guidance. Publication of the guidance is not likely to occur until October 2014 due to the discussions on the principle of moving to non-statutory guidance. The British Poultry Council has considered responses to its consultation on the detail of the meat chicken and breeding bird guidance and aims to publish its response in parallel with the full Government response later this year.

Annex A: List of respondents

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (including BPEX, EBLEX and DairyCo divisions)

British Cattle Veterinary Association

British Egg Industry Council

British Pig Association

British Poultry Council

British Veterinary Association

Castle veterinary group

Compassion in World Farming

Country, Land, Business Association

Delaware Veterinary Group / Goat Vet Society

Farm Animal Welfare Committee

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (2 responses)

Game Farmers Association

Local Government Animal Health & Welfare officer

Member of the public (3 responses)

Member of the public, veterinary surgeon (2 responses)

National Animal Health and Welfare Panel (NAHWP)

National Farmers Union

National Farmers Union for Scotland

National Pig Association

Norfolk Cornerstones Group - Reference group drawn from the farming industry

OneKind

Primrose Herd pig farm

Queen Mary, University of London

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC, 2 responses)

Sheep Veterinary Society

Soil Association

Sustain

T G Broumpton and Son pig farm

Trading Standards (2 responses)

Trading Standards Institute

University of Bristol (2 responses)

World Aquatic Veterinary Medical Association

World Society for the Protection of Animals

Yorkshire Dairy Goats and St Helen's Farm Milk Supplier Group

Young Farmers/Livestock

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This document/publication is also available on our website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/farm-animal-welfare-codes-reform>

The consultation documents can be found on our website at:

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/farming/farm_animal_welfare_codes/consult_view

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