

ANIMAL WELFARE – THE IMPORTANCE OF VETERINARY LEGISLATION AND THE ROLE OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION

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Animal welfare as an issue to be addressed by the OIE was formally introduced into the OIE third strategic plan (2001–05). To date (2012), several standards have been adopted in the OIE *Terrestrial* and *Aquatic Codes* and the OIE has published guidance documents on animal welfare related topics. Notwithstanding this progress, the fact that OIE Member countries need more support in implementing the OIE's animal welfare standards has been recognised and is one of the themes of this conference.

As part of the OIE PVS Pathway for Good Governance, and noting the veterinary legislation is a key element of the national veterinary infrastructure, the OIE implemented a global initiative for strengthening veterinary legislation: the Veterinary Legislation Support Programme (VLSP). Under this programme, and at the request of OIE Member countries that wish to follow the PVS Pathway, OIE trained experts conduct missions to identify gaps and needs relating to the national veterinary legislation.

The OIE Guidelines on Veterinary Legislation were developed in 2009 to provide Members with a framework for drafting legislation of acceptable quality, which would give the Veterinary Services of Member countries a clear legal framework for their activities. These Guidelines recommend that veterinary legislation include a clear statement of scope and, at a minimum, include provisions to protect animal health and food security, food safety, public health and animal welfare as defined by the OIE. When drafting veterinary legislation on the topic of animal welfare, Members have the opportunity to address the OIE standards in the context of their own particular social, economic, legal and cultural norms. Legislation on animal welfare must accommodate the uses of animals by society while at the same time ensuring that animals are treated humanely.

Society recognizes the important role of veterinarians, based on their training and professional activities, in relation to both animal health and welfare. Additionally, the OIE continues to highlight the responsibility of the veterinary profession for improving animal health and welfare globally. At the national level, the veterinary profession must be actively involved both in the implementation and enforcement of laws on animal welfare and also in drafting these laws. Veterinary involvement is required to ensure that provisions relating to animal welfare are founded on scientific principles, not on emotional considerations.

Part one of this presentation briefly reviews the VLSP approach and presents some general observations on findings relevant to animal welfare. Comments on the legislative framework for the veterinary profession, with reference to activities relating to animal welfare, are presented in part two.

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