

National Assembly for Wales All Party Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW)
Annual Conference 27 July 2005

In Attendance

Chair, Lorraine Barrett AM (Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth)
Claire Lawson, RSPCA Cymru Wales
Ken Stebbings, National Assembly Technical Services
Carli Harper-Penman, League Against Cruel Sports
Kit Davidson, Animal Aid
Tess Benson, Humane Slaughter Association
Huw Thomas, NFU Cymru
David Williams, British Veterinary Association, South Wales Division
Sian Edwards, Dogs Trust
Roy Peckham, Pit Pony Sanctuary
Micky Davenport, Badger Watch and Rescue
Siwan Ann Jones, Badger Watch and Rescue
Michael Sharrat, Badger Watch and Rescue
Norman Brown, International League for the Protection of Horses
Philip Jones, International League for the Protection of Horses
Suzanne Campbell, Protection of Wild Animals
John Campbell, Protection of Wild Animals
Sarah Marsh, Greyhound Rescue Wales
Alain Thomas, Greyhound Rescue Wales
Wendy Davies, British Horse Society
Secretariat, Lucy Merredy, Abigail Hughes and Dylan Bowen, Morgan Allen Moore Cymru

Item 1: Intensive Rearing of Game Birds,

i) Introduced by Kit Davidson from Animal Aid.

Mr Davidson explained how and why he became involved with Animal Aid.

The following points were made during the presentation:

- Animal Aid is against breeding for shooting purposes. It wants breeders 'named and shamed'.
- Animal Aid want to introduce welfare standards for game; they want Wales to take the lead by banning barren cage breeding
- The condition in which game is bred in this country is 'appalling'.
 - There are usually ten hens and one cock per small pen; they can stay there for up to two years.
 - The pen is usually a galvanised steel box with a sloping floor. A light is used to encourage increased laying (mating usually starts 1st April).
 - The birds are constantly trying to escape.
 - The eggs are collected and put into an incubator to be hatched.
 - Once the chicks are hatched they are moved to heated verandas and then released into an enclosure ready to be shot.
 - Sometimes chicken hens are used.
 - An average chick is sold for 85 pence.
- The popular excuse breeders and shooters use is that they are "shooting our food". However, pheasant is not eaten all year round and the amount that is bred by far surpasses demand. The Countryside Alliance ran a campaign 'Game to Eat' which encapsulates this mentality.
- Mr Davidson then drew attention to the mask which pheasants are forced to wear.
- The Advertising Standards Authority ruled after a complaint that the slogan of 'wild, natural, and free-range' was acceptable as people understood it in terms of meat not habitat. It did not matter that the game may not have spent any of its life in the wild.
- DEFRA's Draft Animal Welfare Bill 2004 had little concern for the welfare of game.

- 'Enriched cages' have astro-turf in them and a perch. This decreases the likelihood of disease thus eradicating the need for medicated feed; it also reduces egg damage and is less labour intensive.
- The British Association of Shooting and Conservation have stated that battery cages are incompatible with its values.
- Carwyn Jones AM has stated that in the past that egg laying cages have been extremely rare in Wales. Reality shows that Wales is home to the largest barren cage rearing development in the UK - Bettws Hall, Powys. It covers three acres – 1160 cages, each 46cm deep. There was no planning permission granted for this development. The owners do not pay rates even though they are a business, the breeders claim the birds do not wear masks but evidence shows they do and the British Association of Shooting and Conservation asked to visit but were refused entry. Approximately 483,500 eggs are laid at Bettws Hall per year.

APGAW Comments

Phillip Jones questioned whether Animal Aid was only concerned with the breeding conditions and not the shooting of game. He also asked what possible solutions there could be to end this sport.

Mr Davidson noted that he believes shooting is morally wrong. He stated that he eats meat but the food from this sport is simply a by-product. Game is only eaten between December and February. Mr Davidson stated that in Holland the sport has already been banned.

Michael Sharrat asked if a customer could tell if a bird has been fed antibiotics.

Mr Davidson replied that there is no way to tell. He stated that DM2 is dangerous, requiring a 28 day withdrawal period. He added that one is forced to trust the game keeper to ensure this has been done.

Lorraine Barrett AM noted that after the Assembly recess she will table a question in the chamber on this subject. She noted that she expected the answer to relate to the economic benefits the sport generates.

Mr Davidson replied that supporting the economy is just one excuse and that no economy should be based on animal cruelty.

Wendy Davies asked who is the principal beneficiary of this sport.

Mr Davidson replied that it is the farmer or breeder who benefits substantially from this inexpensive method of breeding.

Item 1: Intensive Rearing of Game Birds, ii) Introduced by Carli Harper-Penman from the League Against Cruel Sports.

Ms Harper-Penman stated she would be primarily focusing on the commercial shooting industry and associated animal welfare issues

The following points were made during the presentation:

- Part of the problem with intensive rearing is that nobody knows exactly how many rearing farms exist.
- There are no legal standard requirements.
- 35 million birds are reared per year; only 40 % survive to become targets
- The APGAW were shown a video displaying the "shocking" conditions on some rearing farms;
 - Wing clipping is extremely common, as are masks.
 - Feather pecking can often lead to cannibalism.

- Measures to stop feather pecking and attempted escapes are often cruel, they include;
- Bitting, Beak Trimming, Specs, Brailing, and Clamping.
- Conditions are cramped, dark, little or no ventilation or cleanliness; disease is rife.
- Many birds die and are simply left in the rearing cages with the other birds.
- Cruelty extends to human inflicted suffering such as holding open wounds to a naked flame.
- Few people have an idea of the extent of these conditions and there exists no safeguarding legislation.

APGAW Comments

Micky Davenport asked what the League Against Cruel Sports is doing to counter this problem.

Ms Harper-Penman stated that they are trying to promote better rearing and change legislation for more space and better welfare which all cost more and so are not that appealing. Press Coverage is key. The Animal Welfare Bill is the perfect opportunity to introduce a new code of practice to really change things, unfortunately this is not happening.

Wendy Davies suggested that the best method to end these conditions is to target breeder's income i.e. rates and planning permission.

Phillip Jones asked which 'side' Ms Penman was on - breeding or shooting.

Ms Harper-Penman responded that she does not endorse either side as both are morally wrong. Welfare is a shorter term goal and a more explicit area.

Claire Lawson noted that the Animal Welfare Bill only touches on welfare and that this is all we have to work with.

Item 2: Equine Welfare,

i) Introduced by Sally Learoyd – RSPCA Equine Re-homing Officer.

Ms Learoyd provided the APGAW with a review of the role horses in the 20th Century including their role in the two World Wars. She then noted the changing role of horses today and explained the developments in the 21st Century where the reliance on horse-power diminished.

The following points were made during the presentation:

- 1968 Minimum Values Order put an end to the cheap exportation of horses.
- Thoroughbreds have always been in ample supply due to the sport of horse-racing. Other breeds such as the cart-horse have been in steep decline.
- Riding schools are also in decline as they are expensive and there has been a lack of interest.
- The role of horse charities has also changed since they have to deal with an increased number of unwanted horses.
- Due to the size and build of horses their recovery rate is slower and more expensive to remedy.
- In Wales the majority of cases involve neglect rather than cruelty.
- There are growing difficulties and confusion surrounding horse passports and microchips.
- Passports are hard to recover when the RSPCA seize a horse it is usually at night with little notice and the police are already involved. The passport is normally held in a different location to the horse itself.
- When a horse/pony is passed on it is usually given a new passport as the details of the previous owner in the old passport contravene the Data Protection Act.
- Owners should have both a passport and a microchip.

APGAW Comments

Phillip Jones asked what Ms Learoyd's view was on the recent EU directive on breeding which removes the breeding selection requirement. He stated that microchips are the best way to improve the situation.

Claire Lawson noted that Britain was later than other countries in adopting the passport framework. Other countries have already realised its problems.

Sarah Marsh questioned whether freeze-marking was still used at all to 'create' distinguishing features.

Ms Learoyd replied that the current system as it stands will fail; micro-chipping is much more efficient and it is permanent. A mark printed under the mane of the horse can be used to show if it carries a micro-chip.

David Williams stated that micro-chipping added with a marking of some kind was a very good idea because it prevents a horse having multiple micro-chips containing differing details.

Wendy Davies stated that many owners do not have a passport. And in some cases it will not work as a few horses do not have distinctive markings, adding that passports are easily tampered with.

Ms Learoyd answered that the microchip system also requires distinctive features to be registered. She stated that the stalling arguments against micro-chipping are weak. She suggested using a cattle passport system for horses.

Claire Lawson raised the issue of cost. She also mentioned that the measures were not brought in for welfare reasons, noting that it had more to do with the food chain to Europe which overrides many peoples priorities.

Philip Jones stated that a crucial period will be after the Autumn sales. Members of APGAW agreed. He also asked what the Assembly's stance was on micro-chipping and whether it had to follow the directive.

Claire Lawson responded that Wales is not an EU member state in its own right and as such cannot interpret the directive as Westminster can.

Roy Peckham raised the issue of horses being sent from Europe to graze in the UK for a while then sent back as British stock which has a higher purchasing value.

Item 3: Animal Health Planning on Welsh Farms

i) Introduced by Ken Stebbings; Environment Planning and Countryside Committee, Technical Services Division

Ken Stebbings stated that his role is to influence policy by providing advice.

The following points were made during the presentation:

- An Animal Health Plan (AHP) is a requirement of Farm Assurance Schemes.
- All farms which sell to supermarkets need an AHP.
- The involvement of a vet is recommended but not required.
- If a farm is covered by Assured Welfare Insurance it is shown by the 'red tractor' logo on the product casing
- All dairy farms fall under the National Dairy Farm Assurance Scheme.
- All organic livestock farmers need an AHP agreed and inspected by certification body.
- An AHP can be a simple calendar format or it may be more detailed.

- Principals of AHP; current status, prevention, prioritises problems, set target, strategy and monitoring, how to promote AHPs
- Research shows that a proactive approach generates more profit. However, persuading farmers is difficult.
- AHP do not appeal to many farmers- paperwork/computers, problems not perceived on their own farm, may be expensive to correct e.g. barns/pens.
- The GB Animal Health Welfare Strategy was published in June 2004. The implementation group comprises industry, stakeholders and the respective government.
- An Action Plan for 2005/6 was also recently published, requiring sector specific AHPs
- The Welsh implementation plan for the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy has now been published.*

* The Welsh implementation plan for the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy can be found at: www.wales.gov.uk/ahwstrategy. A hard copy of the Action Plan can also be available, it may be obtained by telephoning Gary Hepple on 029 2082 3560 or e.mail: gary.hepple@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

APGAW Comments

David Williams asked if a farmer is able to create and fulfil the AHP on his own.

Mr Stebbings replied that since welfare is characterised by a lack of ill-health it can be a simple plan which is easy to maintain. Organic farms are slightly different but a farmer can carry out the AHP himself but it must pass the Farm Assurance Plan.

Wendy Davies stated that organic farmers are more restricted.

Mr Stebbings noted that there is a grant available in many cases. Organic farmers focus more on prevention as the treatment options are reduced, people have a good perception of them and thus they may receive better support.

Sarah Marsh asked if there were any new initiatives, like Farming Connect.

Roy Peckham stated that younger farmers are generally more capable of using IT.

Mr Stebbings replied that there are numerous initiatives for training but none which provide grants.

Tess Benson asked whether the health plan goes as far as contingency planning for disease prevalence.

Mr Stebbings stated that the plan will only cover diseases within the farmers' control.

Suzanne Campbell asked if there was any proposed method for recording welfare problems and causes of any animal deaths on farms.

Mr Stebbings replied that there is no real monitoring, mainly a reliance on the local community and the Rural Inspectorate of the Assembly. It is hard for farmers to admit the real reason for death.

Sarah Marsh asked if the RSPCA have any involvement.

Mr Stebbings noted that there will be a consultation and any input would be welcomed.

Alain Thomas stated that there is a lack of commitment; attitudes and behaviour have to be changed.

Lorraine Barrett AM asked if there is any guide for composing an AHP.

Mr Stebbings noted that they are working on this.

Claire Lawson reminded the group that health is just one area of the Animal Welfare Bill.

Roy Peckham asked about animals in a poor condition which are not kept on farms.

Mr Stebbings replied that it would concern the RSPCA, the animal Welfare Bill covers this area.

ii) Introduced by Tess Benson, Technical Officer Humane Slaughter Association.

Ms Benson told the APGAW that her organisation were primarily concerned with best practice guidelines for the slaughter of sheep, goats, pigs, turkeys and they are currently working on fish. They are seeking to change legislation to make humane slaughter a legal requirement.

The following points were made during the presentation:

- The Humane Slaughter Association believes all animals should be stunned before being killed.
- The Humane Slaughter Association have launched a 30 minute video and a booklet instructing farmers what to do if they are faced with a casualty animal and provide advice on stunned animals
- Other work areas include exotic species i.e. ostriches, however it is marred by lots of grey areas.
- Schedule 19 means that an animal is killed on a farm before transportation.
- There have been successful moves in the killing of some fish species for commercial purposes. Stunning is now largely used instead of CO₂ killing.

APGAW comments

Huw Thomas stated that he was not aware that farmers had the facilities to slaughter animals. He has no experience of farmers taking it into their own hands

Wendy Davies stated that farmers are not qualified or capable of slaughtering an animal.

Ms Benson responded that she refers to it in the context of the UK as a whole and in emergency cases. The video and booklet are there to guide the farmer in this task.

Claire Lawson noted that it is a matter that falls under the rights of property.

Susanne Campbell raised the issue of Halal meat.

Tess Benson responded that Halal meat requires an animal to have its throat cut while facing Mecca and has Allah's name ingrained on it. Muslims demand that animals are alive when it is slaughtered, the HSA has proven that if an animal is stunned it is not dead; 98% of Halal meat is now produced using stunning methods. Retailers have the most influence on the market.

Sarah Marsh asked how easy it is to get the relevant captive bolt gun.

Ms Benson responded that it is very easy, a gun licence is granted for life and it cannot be revoked unless the handler is caught in the act of misusing it. Expense is the only real restriction.

Lorraine Barrett AM questioned whether leaving a fish out of water was less humane than fish-farming.

Ms Benson stated that farming is the way forward. Cod is being successfully farmed in Scotland.

Item 4: Animal Welfare Bill/ Clean Neighbourhoods Act/ Greyhound Forum/ Bovine TB.

Claire Lawson noted that there was no update available at this current time on the Animal Welfare Bill and the Clean Neighbourhood Act.

Bovine TB

Michael Sharratt stated that the Badger Watch and Rescue have asked to be on the TB Action Group set up by the Welsh Assembly Government, as the Action Group cannot represent them. He stated that the current system for testing cattle was not adequate and that the Minister Carwyn, Jones AM had been made aware of this.

Claire Lawson noted that to include the Badger Group on the TB Action Group would indicate that it is just a Badger problem.

Michael Sharratt noted that very few badgers have been found to carry TB compared to the number of cattle infected. Dr Cheeseman has stated that it is impossible for cattle to spread TB to one another. The TB Action Group have put proposals forward for the live testing of badgers, live testing is not possible.

Lorraine Barrett AM stated that she had come across this proposal and that there were not enough badgers which had died naturally to test, resulting in a cull of live badgers.

Mr Sharratt stated that it appears that Wales will not be carrying out a badger cull. Wales will be breaking the law by performing a cull before Krebs Report is published.

Claire Lawson stated that the group has clarified its position and is moving away from the testing of wildlife, which would have involved 'killing' wildlife. The farming unions have stated that their members still want a cull, so a balance is needed. She stressed the need to avoid unnecessary killing.

Greyhound Forum

Alain Thomas stated that the background of the Greyhound dog is widely known. There are three Greyhound race-tracks in Wales, all of which are independently run. In May 2004 there was a full meeting of all track owners where they created the Wales Greyhound Forum; intended to improve the welfare of the dogs. An element of trust has developed in some areas between the three tracks and Greyhound Rescue Wales. He maintained that partnership was the key.

Mr Thomas highlighted four initiatives;

- Responsible Ownership – Greyhound Rescue Wales have provided literature on this, mixed feedback.
- System of Registration – Since anyone can own and race a dog, it prevents an owner holding a dog back to get good odds then letting it go and moving to another track.
- Good Homing Practice - Greyhound Rescue Wales has produced guidance material on this subject.
- Care of ex-race dogs – finding suitable accommodation for ex-race dogs.

-End of Conference-