

European Action Plan

The European Commission announced on 26th January 2006 that it was launching an Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals running until 2010, at the beginning of the Austrian Presidency. The Plan was launched with an International Conference on 30th March 2006 in Brussels at which all interested parties were represented, from farmers to vegetarian NGOs. The conference was packed to capacity, showing how important animal welfare is to many different interest groups in Europe and how seriously it is being taken.

It was hoped by the Austrians that this would be the first of many Animal Welfare conferences designed to put together the disparate 'stakeholders' in the subject with a view to enhancing standards of welfare across Europe.

Details of the Action Plan are available on the Commission Website and proceedings of the Conference will be available on the Conference website.

Notably, the Commissioner himself, Markos Kyprianou, opened the Conference and said he would not want to miss this opportunity, and seeming very enthusiastic about his role as, inter alia, Commissioner for Animal Welfare. It seems that this portfolio is now under Consumer Protection, which in itself is significant.

The Commission is open to all suggestions it seems on the subject of animal welfare, and ALAW readers are encouraged to consider areas of particular concern in this regard.

It was clear that the specialist groups (producers/retailers) were very well represented and organised for the conference, and therefore the stakes are high for progress towards reform by 2010. The Conference speakers were anxious that lowering standards to the lowest common denominator is not the agenda, but increasing them from those currently existing within the 25 Member States. This, despite obvious difficulties with WTO negotiations, where it was felt by some that the EU Commission was not pressing hard enough to ensure animal welfare was on the agenda in that area, and therefore the spectre of imports from non-welfare friendly systems at cheaper prices was a current worry for the producers, which they were not shy to express.

When the proceedings are available, a synopsis will be provided for ALAW members.

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