



RSPCA Hugely disappointed by EU animal transport stalemate

For immediate release

Thursday 10 November 2011

The RSPCA is hugely disappointed that the European Commission is not expected to improve animal transport laws.

Every year millions of animals are transported over long distances across Europe – many of them for further fattening or slaughter.

Today (10 November) a report by the European Commission has proposed no changes to the existing legislation governing animal transport – despite huge welfare concerns from the RSPCA which has been monitoring the trade in animals to the continent.

The RSPCA believe the current rules are not strong enough and animals can potentially suffer severely as a result of:

- Long journey times - sheep and cattle be legally be transported for 29 hours with just a one hour break on board the lorry
- A lack of space - animals may not be able to comfortably lie down, reach food and water, and drivers cannot properly inspect animals for illness and injury
- Animals can legally be transported in temperatures of up to 35c
- Automatic ventilation is not compulsory, even for lorries travelling through hot countries
- Poor enforcement and insufficient penalties gives little incentive for hauliers to comply with the current legislation

Julia Wrathall, head of the RSPCA's farm animal science team, said: "Although EU legislation on animal transport may have created minor improvements in welfare the RSPCA strongly believes no animals should be transported for more than eight hours for further fattening and slaughter.

"We believe eight hours is the absolute maximum time for which animals should have to cope with being transported and we are disappointed the European Commission seems to be ignoring this key issue.

"The current state of play is a catch 22 situation. Enforcement is so poor and penalties are so pitiful there is little incentive for hauliers to stick to the rules, but even if every driver complied with the legislation the RSPCA does not believe the rules go far enough to prevent some animals suffering severely.

"We were really hopeful that the EC would take this opportunity to change conditions for the better – which would improve the lives of millions of animals which suffer needlessly every year."

To improve the welfare of animals being transported the RSPCA is calling for:

- Animals to be slaughtered close to where they were reared to reduce transportation

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- An end of the long-distance transport of animals destined for further fattening or slaughter, replaced with a carcass only-trade
- A maximum eight-hour journey time for all animals
- Better implementation and enforcement of the legislation by member states and EC

A vast majority of hauliers in the UK are believed to be complying with the legislation but the issue is still hugely important as thousands of calves and sheep are regularly being transported from Ramsgate, Kent, to France where they potentially face long journeys across Europe, and much of the meat on sale here has been reared in other countries.

The EU legislation also covers the transport of dogs, cats and rabbits and the RSPCA is calling for the introduction of much stricter rules in this area, particularly as it is aware of a large trade from central Europe and Ireland to the UK.

Dr James Yeates, head of the RSPCA's companion animal science team, added: "The transport of puppies, kittens and rabbits is also a major concern particularly with the relaxation of quarantine rules in less than two months time.

"Thanks to campaigning by the RSPCA no puppy or kitten younger than eight-weeks-old can be transported without its mother. However the legislation does not specify a space allowance or maximum journey time. In this respect puppies, kittens and rabbits have even less protection than farm animals.

"I think the public would be appalled to think of kittens and puppies – which often come from large scale breeders and puppy farms – embarking on very long journeys in cramped conditions."

The RSPCA is encouraging supporters to ask their MEP not to accept the committee's proposal and call for an improvement.

Ends

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