

REGULATING THE SALE OF COMPANION ANIMALS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The 335th Session of the Animal welfare Intergroup, which took place on Thursday 6 April 2017, has focused on the need of regulating the sale of companion animals in the European Union.

This is an issue that raises major welfare concerns.

Joe Moran, Political Affairs Adviser at Eurogroup for Animals outlined in his presentation how existing legal powers have not been sufficiently used to go after unscrupulous sellers of dogs and cats online, and how these advertisements both feed demand and drive the supply of the illegal trade.

He asked MEPs for help with the collection of data - through their constituents - so that the full force of the law can be brought against those who continue to sell sick, dangerous or behaviorally unsound pets online to unsuspecting owners. *“Eurogroup for Animals will continue to work to stem both the demand and the supply that fuels the illegal trade in cats and dogs. However, in order to stop this trade once and for all, we need to address their sales online.”*

“Too often prospective owners turn to classified advertising sites rather than rehoming. It’s high time that we clamp down on these practices, which fuel demand further and provide an outlet for the supply. Such advertisements are inherently misleading. They mask a culture of cruelty to the animals and too often leave new owners broken hearted. The powers are there to go after these unscrupulous sellers. Now we will ensure they are used”.

Daniela Pichler, Head of Campaigns, Companion Animals at FOUR PAWS international presented the campaign: “the Pet Deception “which tackles the problem of poorly regulated trading of pets on classified sites. She called for Europe-wide laws to regulate the trade in companion animals online and stated: *“fraudulent sellers are exploiting the internet to sell animals as it gives them anonymity and international reach providing the perfect environment to make millions in untaxed profits. The marketed animals are often poorly bred, unvaccinated and sick and stem from mass breeder networks. Laws for identity-verified seller accounts and limited private animal sales would end this unregulated and dangerous ‘black market’ for pets online. She added “it is very important that all breeders and sellers establishments are licensed and that these details are held on a publically accessible database. Furthermore it should be required by law that sellers display their registration number when selling animals online and that a competent authority is made responsible for handling complaints regarding animals sales in particular for those sales via the internet. This would close the loopholes in the pet trade, and help to better protect both the animals sold online and the consumers who acquire a pet online.”*

Simona Lipstaite, European Policy Advisor at the EU Dog & Cat Alliance's spoke about the need to tackle the illegal trade in dogs and cats in the EU. Each year, hundreds of thousands of companion animals are illegally traded across the Member States. She said –*“the implications of the illegal trade in dogs and cats in the EU go far beyond simply animal health and welfare. They can also affect public health and consumer rights of EU citizens, as well as negatively impact the EU internal market in lost taxes and by creating unfair competition. The European Commission should take the lead in drawing up a comprehensive action plan which would address all of these issues and involve the Parliament and Member States, including border and veterinary authorities, in tackling this abominable trade.”*

Sirpa Pietikäinen President of the European Parliament Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals said *“the new Animal Health Regulation provides in its delegated acts several instruments that can help to regulate the sale of pets.*

Moreover this legislation foresees that breeders and sellers have to be registered but it doesn’t specify how. The Commission should utilize its powers in this area to ensure that these provisions are used to its maximum effect”. In this context she welcomed the calls of Four Paws’ “Pet Deception campaign” and suggested that the Intergroup should send a letter to the Commission in support of the call of licensing all breeder and sellers establishments and to set up a publically accessible data base on this.