

Cats Protection's Chief Executive's talk in the EU Parliament



Act for pets

We have about 66 million owned cats and 60 million owned dogs within the European Union. That helps us see the size and importance of the trade, which is the focus of the EU's interest.

And every one of these is a sentient being and, as stated in the Lisbon Treaty, we have to '*pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals*'. I care about animal welfare and to me it is that sentience, the ability of these cats and dogs to feel, that makes these numbers, this trade, and every single one of these animals vitally important. Yes, vitally important – a matter of life and death. That is why companion animals should be protected by EU legislation



Picture: Jessi-Cat and Lorcan by Paul Maven Photography

Every day, in Cats Protection, we meet huge numbers of people who care for their cats and dogs as valued members of their families, people in tears at having to give up a cat, or overjoyed at taking home one adopted from us. I met Lorcan and his mother who explained to me how Jessi-Cat had helped Lorcan overcome his selective mutism, inability to speak to his teachers and other people.

These feelings have existed for thousands of years. Ancient Greeks and Romans would bury their pets along the roadside in marked graves. This text is from the tombstone of Patricus, a Roman dog:

“My eyes were wet with tears, our little dog, when I bore thee (to the grave)... Patricus... Never can you be contentedly in my lap. In sadness have I buried you... In a resting place of marble... Ah, me! What a loved companion have we lost!”



Picture: Lily

Millions of cats and dogs are well-cared for but, sadly, too many are still seen as purely a source of income, being used solely for breeding for commercial trading.

Recently at one of our cat rescue and adoption centres I heard about Lily and her four beautiful kittens. She came into Cats Protection from a 'not-so-nice home', and the sad truth is that Lily was 10 years old and had been used for breeding, like a breeding machine, over and over, all her life. This length of demand on her poor little body had taken its toll and she was suffering severe kidney failure. The vet explained that there was nothing more we could do for her. Her kidneys would not hold out much longer and the kindest thing we could do was end her suffering and have her put to sleep.



Picture: Lily's kittens

It was then a race to get her tiny kittens fully weaned as they were still just a few weeks old – much earlier than we would normally wean but we didn't want to compromise her welfare.

In the interests of trade, this poor cat suffered kidney failure and lost her life. These kittens lost their mother.

Every day, whether it is 100 puppies in a puppy farm or 100 kittens in 25 domestic kitchens, animals are suffering and consumers are being misled and this is happening in a poorly regulated trade.

And this is where European legislation is key.

Technical

Some technical points – the basis of the EU only allows actions to be taken on the bases of agriculture, the single market (consumer protection) and veterinary/public health.

EU successes

Despite these limitations we should celebrate the successes for cats and dogs on:

- 🐾 the marketing of pure-bred animals
- 🐾 cat and dog fur
- 🐾 the commercial movements of cats and dogs
- 🐾 the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) on the non-commercial movement of pet animals,) and
- 🐾 protection of cats and dogs when being transported commercially

Problems

However, new problems have arisen that can only be properly tackled at a European level.

- 🐾 The PETS scheme makes it easier for us to take our dogs on holiday, or take our cat when moving home from one country to another. But a growing body of evidence shows a rise in illegal pet trading (mainly in puppies) throughout the EU. Traders are exploiting existing weaknesses in the system to move animals (more often than not in horrific circumstances) via non-commercial means, yet for wholly commercial purposes. And even where better enforcement of legislation could help – how can the age of a

kitten or puppy be proven against a passport that is still too open to fraud?

- 🐾 And to take the animals purely as pets – what can the consumer expect if buying Lily's kittens from the kitchen of her former home – with a mother dying of kidney failure? Or a dog or a cat that has been poorly bred and socialised? As many of us know, there is a cat crisis across most of Europe, and consumers who buy cats without knowing that they should be neutered as early possible (a situation worsened by the 'one litter myth'), and not properly socialised, are likely to end up with pets that are prone to aggression, and are likely to mark their territory in the home in unwanted ways! How can consumers judge? We too often hear tragic stories of children being mauled by dogs
- 🐾 Just as worrying are the families buying a pet in good faith – perhaps one that fits with current fashions – that has either a disease, inherited disorders or exaggerated conformation – a cat or a dog that might look like the picture perfect pet, but is likely to leave their owners heartbroken within months or years, because they have been bred in ways that mean that they don't have the happy, healthy lives that their owners would want for them. How are we protecting these consumers, and these animals?
- 🐾 On top of this comes the threat to the health and welfare of other animals – and humans – that these animals can come into contact with. Illegal traders and breeders across Europe are threatening the health and well-being of pet and owner alike. The risks are not only the headline diseases like rabies, but many other diseases pose a serious risk too

EU solutions

So what can be done to address these problems? There are both legislative and non-legislative measures, such as consumer guidance.

Eurogroup for Animals and our Member Organisations, including Cats Protection, believe that there is a demonstrable need for mandatory identification and registration of companion animals at European level, so that it is clear where responsibility lies for ownership and care. This would also bring the commercial trading of pets via non-commercial bases out of the shadows, and provide for healthier and happier animals and better consumer protection. Alongside this, the introduction of breeding and trade standards would provide a level playing field across

the Union, ensuring that cats and dogs are born, reared and socialised in ways that would maximise their welfare throughout their lives.

Act for pets

We would identify three priority areas, which fall perfectly into the current competences of the Union in terms of legislation:

- 🐾 Proper traceability: Until owners are required to have pets registered shortly after the animal's birth, we won't have proper traceability. It should be possible, and inexpensive, for owners to microchip and register their pet, and for this information to change as the cat or dog changes hands – just as it does with a car. Indeed, a month ago, the Commission adopted a similar system for equines and we need to copy this model for cats and dogs. We also hope to see this recommendation reflected in the final report from the CALLISTO project into zoonotic diseases later this year
- 🐾 Greater transparency of the market in cats and dogs: We need to know who is selling them. We could get into arguments about licensed versus unlicensed breeders another time, but all breeders and sellers of cats and dogs should at least have to be registered in some way. Then it would be down to the Member States to properly regulate them. Any market requires supply as well as demand, and in this market the breeders should not be allowed to operate supply in the shadows. Again, the good news is that this provision is there in the proposed Animal Health Law too, and it is crucial that it is interpreted as such
- 🐾 Minimum breeding standards: Consumers buying animals from another country within the Union should know that their pet was bred in a responsible way that isn't detrimental to the health and welfare either of that cat or dog, or of themselves. As a minimum, there would be room for consumer guidance on this, but many of us believe that we should push for a legal base for breeding and sale standards within any forthcoming Animal Welfare Framework Law



Picture: Lily and her kittens

In conclusion, if you're a cat or dog in Europe, your chances of having a good life are better than in many parts of the world – partly thanks to existing legislation at European level. However big challenges still face us, and as the means are there, we owe it to our companions – our cats and dogs – to ensure that their lives are made as good as they possibly can be, so that each one can prosper.

Until we make the effort, Lily will be in a long line of beautiful creatures facing a dreadful life – and when we make that effort, there will be fewer such dreadful cases of exploitation of cats and dogs, where cats like Lily have their lives taken in the name of trade.