

## **Addressing the bottleneck to effective animal protection in Europe**

Over the years, the European Union (EU) has become a world leader in animal welfare, influencing policy within the Union of 28 nations and beyond. Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, recognises animals as sentient and obliges the 28 Member States to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals. However, despite such advances, there are still millions of animals living in substandard conditions in Europe today.

Despite the required commitment to animal protection, there is no European-wide animal welfare law. Instead, animal protection has devolved responsibility to the EU Member States, and whilst some EU-wide legislation exists (for domestic species), provision of animal protection is largely reliant upon national legislation, competent authorities, religious rites, cultural traditions and sufficient investment. Unsurprisingly, standards vary widely across the EU and change is unlikely, unless significant efforts are made to support Member States to meet their obligations in animal protection.

The Born Free Foundation strives to improve the welfare of animals in the European Union and, in particular, seeks the protection of wild animals kept in captivity. Our investigations have revealed that animals in zoos, circuses, dolphinariums and kept as pets are often housed in the worst of conditions, predominantly because those responsible for their protection lack knowledge of their welfare needs. The EU Zoo Inquiry 2011 revealed that the implementation and enforcement of animal protection law is obstructed by inexperienced authorities, which largely permit captive facilities to regulate themselves. Actions are underway to influence the provision of greater support of EU Member State competent authorities, however, unless there is greater centralised and coordinated leadership, a 'one stop shop' for animal protection in Europe, improvements will be minimal.

The presentation will refer to the following:

**Article 13 TFEU** - established recognition of animal sentience and the obligation on EU Member States to establish law to protect animals.

**The EU Zoo Inquiry** - initiated and undertaken by the Born Free Foundation to evaluate the implementation and enforcement of the EU Zoos Directive across the EU ([www.euzooinquiry.eu](http://www.euzooinquiry.eu)). Findings revealed a lack of effective implementation and poor enforcement, predominantly as a result of the incompetence of competent authorities and enforcement agencies. Conditions for animals in the majority of zoos in the EU were found to be substandard.

**Dolphinarium-Free Europe coalition** - established by the Born Free Foundation to bring together NGOs that work to end the captivity of cetaceans in Europe, consolidating and directing efforts and resources to effectively lobby and campaign. (<http://endcap.eu/dolphinarium/free-europe/>)

**Questionnaire to Member State authorities** - building on the findings of the EU Zoo Inquiry, the initiative by the Born Free Foundation was to identify the knowledge gaps, and therefore the training needs, of competent authorities in the protection of animals. 16/28 Member States responded and findings are being used to push for EU leadership in animal protection and the provision of customised training.

**One stop shop for animal protection** - seeking to establish a centralised point for information and training to improve knowledge and capacity in Member States. Activities are currently focused on the European Commission, which is ideally placed to provide such an information point. It is vital that the one stop shop caters for all animals under human care and not only those under the competency of the EU. (<http://www.bornfree.org.uk/one-stop-shop/>)

**MEPs For Wildlife** - established by five Members of the European Parliament, in collaboration with the Born Free Foundation, to focus efforts by MEPs on issues concerning animal protection. Current objectives include the improvement of enforcement of animal protection legislation, the development of an EC Action Plan on wildlife trafficking and seeking greater commitment from the European Commission to combat wildlife trafficking.

<end>