

## NAWAC GUIDELINE 10:

# Phasing out one animal management system in favour of another

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### 1. Introduction

Public submissions on some codes of welfare ask that NAWAC recommend the phasing out of particular systems of animal management because the advocates of the alternative systems which would then be used consider them to confer better welfare. This has led NAWAC to consider the basis on which it could make such a recommendation.

### 2. NAWAC's considered position

NAWAC considers that it can recommend the phasing out of a particular management system only if the alternatives available to replace it confer a significant gain in *net* animal welfare status. Making such a recommendation where the *net* welfare status of the animals would not be demonstrably improved would not advance animal welfare.

Moreover, such a recommendation would not be fair or reasonable to those affected directly by it and could justifiably be challenged legally.

NAWAC is therefore concerned that any recommended change does not simply replace one set of welfare problems with a different set which, in *net* welfare terms, is equally bad. NAWAC notes that all systems for managing livestock are attended by some animal welfare problems – no system is exempt. Thus, one system for managing a particular species of animal will have identifiable animal welfare problems and benefits, and alternatives to that system may solve some or most of those problems by having other benefits, but bring with them different, and equally worrying, welfare problems.

NAWAC also considers the extent to which the minimum standards that can be applied effectively within a system can and do minimise the identified welfare problems within that system, noting that it is the strengths (welfare benefits), weaknesses (welfare compromises of different types that can occur) and safeguards (the minimum standards directed at minimising particular compromises) that together inform NAWAC's views on whether or not different systems can confer acceptable welfare in *net* terms.

### 3. Judging net animal welfare status

Animal welfare is multidimensional. It includes the nutritional, environmental, health, behavioural and cognitive/neural functions of animals which are relevant to their physical, health and behavioural needs. All have to be considered when assessing *net* animal welfare status.

NAWAC noted in its Guideline 06 that, at present, there are three main orientations adopted when groups or individuals make judgements about animal welfare status. These approaches emphasise biological function, affective state (the animal's positive or negative experiences) and natural state. Approaches that emphasise *biological function* are centred primarily on the *physical and health needs* of animals, those emphasising *affective state* relate mainly to animals' *physical, health and/or behavioural needs*, and those centred primarily on *natural state* relate mainly to animals' *behavioural needs*.

NAWAC noted in addition that:

- (a) the biological function and affective state orientations are complementary in their outcomes and overlap to a significant degree;
- (b) the natural state orientation is more limited in its application, as it focuses mainly on behavioural freedom, and, if applied, its implications must be tempered by considerations relating to both biological function and affective state; and
- (c) nevertheless, judgements made according to biological function and affective state should also take account of natural state considerations.

Thus, NAWAC does not view these as separate and mutually exclusive orientations but considers all three when making its recommendations.

#### 4. Conclusions

All systems of livestock management in current use confer animal welfare benefits, yet all systems are also attended by some animal welfare problems. It is the purpose of minimum standards to minimise those problems and keep them within acceptable limits. The welfare problems attendant on various systems may be different, as may be the benefits. It is the *net* welfare status of animals managed under various systems that NAWAC attempts to assess comprehensively, taking into consideration the multidimensional nature of animal welfare and the various orientations to animal welfare. When the *net* welfare status of animals managed under two or more systems cannot be clearly separated, there are no sustainable grounds upon which NAWAC could recommend phasing out one of those systems in favour of another. Hence, NAWAC's view is that it can recommend the phasing out of a particular management system only if the alternative or alternatives available to replace it will confer a significant gain in *net* animal welfare status.

<p>This guideline was approved by NAWAC on 9 September 2005. This guideline is not a legal interpretation of the Animal Welfare Act 1999. It is anticipated that this guideline will be updated from time to time in light of experience gained by NAWAC during its deliberations.</p>
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