**EU-WIDE IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION (I&R) FOR COMPANION ANIMALS**

**PROPOSAL OF THE EU CANINE TRACEABILITY EXPERTS GROUP**

## INTRODUCTION

*What and who is CARO?*

"CARO" is an acronym for "Companion Animal Responsible Ownership". CARO is a group of animal welfare-engaged stakeholders whose goal is to strengthen the responsible ownership of companion animals in Europe.

*Outcome, goal and solution strategies*

CARO's goal is necessary in the face of the suffering of companion animals in the streets, sometimes in shelters, in illegal breeding activities, and during illegal transport; it is necessary in order to reduce the health risks to humans and other animals; and it is necessary in order to stop the increasing illegal puppy trade, which has created a black market. To develop sustainable solutions within the EU to combat these trends, the EU and the Member States must create a harmonised culture of dog and cat ownership with clear legislative measures. They must also fulfil the general provision of Art 13 TFEU, in recognition of the fact that animals are sentient beings, and that dogs and cats have been accompanying humans for 15,000 years.

There are several key components that must be combined to produce the successful long-term solution outlined above. One such component is to create transparency, making dog and cat owners visibly responsible by means of Identification and Registration (I&R) of companion animals. The benefits of an effective EU-wide system include: reuniting a lost animal with its owner (at less cost for shelters); being able to communicate with the owner about responsible attitudes (e.g. education, insurance); tracing the source of an epidemic disease; tracing the owner in the event of a car accident caused by a companion animal; and, for the first time, gathering reliable data for each Member State, which would provide information on breeding trends, on movements of companion animals, and on neutering projects.

*The CARO websites*

Over the last five years, the CARO members have worked on several strategic levels. An online platform has been created to make available a comprehensive range of information relating to responsible ownership: www.carodog.eu and www.carocat.eu.

*The CARO conferences*

Many high-level conferences on this subject have been held in Brussels, as well as one in Vilnius and one in Teramo. There have also been several workshops and roundtables.

*The CARO EU Canine Traceability Experts Group*

To address the key component of Identification and Registration, a CARO EU Canine Traceability Experts Group was founded in September 2010. It is a high-level multi-stakeholder working group.

The members are: the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), Istituto Zooprofilattico e Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e Molise "G.Caporale" Teramo (IZSAM), Europetnet (EPN), the Belgian (Flemish) Animal Welfare Department, Planet ID, Datamars, TASSO e.V., VIER PFOTEN/FOUR PAWS and, as an observer, the EU Commission's Animal Welfare Unit. Over the last five years, the Group has proved through workshops and meetings that an EU-wide harmonised I&R system is both necessary and feasible, and would help to solve the above-mentioned problems resulting from dog and cat overpopulation across Europe.
The CARO team has organised various events and conferences to identify possible solutions. In October 2013, a workshop was held on these topics at the Permanent Representation of Lithuania, where – among other things – the scenario of a delegated act on I&R by the EU was discussed with delegates from several Member States. In 2015, the EU Commission concluded the trialogue on the new EU Animal Health Law, now called the "EU Regulation on Transmissible Animal Diseases". For this new legislation, most stakeholders proposed directly implementing mandatory I&R for the traceability of companion animals. Despite this, the present draft of the Regulation only contains an empowerment clause (Art 113 ff.) which gives the Commission the possibility of adopting delegated and implementing acts on I&R for companion animals.

*The Group's proposal for a sustainable solution including an EU-wide I&R system*

Taking into consideration the results of the intensive interdisciplinary work of the CARO Experts Group, and the prospect of delegated acts on I&R in the EU within the proposed new Regulation, the following document can serve as a support to the EU in drafting the legal establishment of a harmonised I&R system in the EU and in its Member States. It is structured in three parts: the European level, the Member States level, and the technical and management details. It concludes with a concrete proposal for a new "European Best Practice System (EBPS)".

## KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EU-WIDE I&R SYSTEM FOR DOGS AND CATS

### A. EUROPEAN LEVEL

**1. Legislation**
a) Legislation and the level below legislation (e.g. guidelines, recommendations in a future Animal Welfare Framework Law)
b) Delegated and implementing acts based on the Animal Health Law with targets (EU Regulation on Transmissible Animal Diseases, Art 113 ff.)
c) Introducing a separate category for dogs and cats in the TRACES system (currently in the broad category of "Other Mammals") – see 5b below

**2. Pet passports**
a) Mandatory registration of the pet passport number associated with the transponder code (also in TRACES)
b) Reuse of pet passports to be banned
c) One passport per animal – no replacement possible, even in the event of relocation
d) Common serial number structure for pet passports in the Member States

**3. Transponders**
a) A delegated act must ensure a valid companion animal identification code by mandatory use of all

relevant ISO standards and rules of the registration authority (ICAR) for companion animal identification
b) All Member States must use the country code (as in France) or guarantee uniqueness when using non-country codes (as in Ireland)
c) Homologation of the companies producing or supplying transponders (licensed manufacturers based on legislation, as in France)
d) Reuse of transponders to be banned by law

**4. Structure**
a) Using compatible national databases, accessible through a single database such as Europetnet
b) Transparency of ISO 1184 structures through harmonisation of national legislation (Member States)
c) Establishment of responsible single contact points and/or staff members in each Competent Authority to enable adequate communication

**5. Statistics**
a) Using the above structure to enable the analysis of trends in the market by tracking imports and movements of dogs and cats, by means of a mandatory reporting system in which databases and Member States report to the EU
b) Introducing a separate category for dogs and cats in the TRACES system (currently in the broad category of "Other Mammals") to enable better control of movements

**6. Training, education and communication**
a) EU to offer harmonised training (e.g. training the Competent Authority teams and veterinarians, including on legal background and technical issues)
b) EU, Member States and NGOs to educate the public to identify and register their companion animals
c) Publication of information and use of existing platforms (e.g. CAROdog and CAROcat)
d) Creation of a pool of expert consultants to help establish a harmonised EU-wide database profile in the Member States (including the EU-wide common denominators of database structures)
e) Rules for vertical and horizontal communication: communication between the central system manager and each Member State Competent Authority for companion animals and I&R (pet passports and transponders), and communication between the Competent Authorities of the 28 Member States

**B. MEMBER STATES LEVEL**

**1. Legislation**
a) Mandatory I&R for dogs (and cats) in the Member States. If different databases already exist in a Member State, they must be made compatible by means of rules and data interfaces
b) Mandatory homologation of manufacturers and of transponders and/or distributors
c) Ensuring that only qualified and registered professionals are authorised to inject transponders, based on EU Regulation 576/2013 Art 13 (Art 22 for pet passport)
d) Mandatory registration of the identifier (e.g. according to the quality standards of Europetnet)
e) Defining which authorised persons or entities have access to the register database (e.g. public authorities, veterinarians, shelters) with regard to the national data
f) Transparency of authorisation rules for entering and updating data in a national database in accordance with national legislation
g) To avoid unfair competition and illegal breeding, Member States must provide clear and coherent definitions of private breeding and commercial breeding. Moreover, breeders must be registered,

licensed and subject to minimum animal welfare/health rules
h) Consistent enforcement of the rules, with strict sanctions in cases of fraud

**2. Structure**
a) Depending on the national government's organisation (e.g. whether it has a centralised or federal structure), to organise communication between existing databases and single contact persons across the Member State
b) In those Member States where owners themselves are permitted to input data about themselves and their dog, to offer information or to develop campaigns and projects for owners, reminding them to keep their data up-to-date on the system (e.g. Belgian campaign for dog and cat owners who change address)

**3. Training, education and information**
The Member States should establish suitable information campaigns for the public and for future owners of dogs and cats in order to strengthen responsible ownership from the very beginning. These should include the information that a prospective owner needs when deciding whether to adopt or buy a dog.

## C. ANALYSIS OF THE STATUS QUO (TECHNICAL ASPECTS)

### 1. OVERVIEW OF ISO 11784 SYSTEMS WITH OR WITHOUT NATIONAL REGULATION ON I&R

The electronic identification of companion animals is regulated on the European level in EU Regulation 576/2013. Today, many national laws concerning electronic identification refer to ISO 11784, and the EU Commission also refers to this standard. Various Members States have practical experience of several identification systems. The following table provides an overview of different implementations in these Member States. The electronic identification systems are named and compared.

## 2. CATEGORISATION OF EXISTING SYSTEMS

### Comparing five systems currently in use

| | Conforms to 11784 | Conforms to 24631-1 | Manufacturer code | Traceability option | Duplicate code check | Guaranteed uniqueness | Passport number stored |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| French system | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no |
| Wismans system | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes/no | no | no |
| Swiss system | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes/no | no | no |
| Country code without rules | yes/no | no | yes/no | no | no | no | no |
| Manufacturer codes only | yes/no | yes/no | yes | no | no | no | no |

- Conforms to 11784 : is the code readable with an ISO 11785 reader?
- Conforms to 24631-1 : is the transponder approved and does the code conform?
- Manufacturer code: can the manufacturer be verified in the code?
- Traceability option: is it possible to trace the animal?
- Duplicate code check: will duplicate codes be identified in the system?
- Guaranteed uniqueness: is it required that the approved manufacturer maintain a database to store chip UID and ISO 11784 code?
- Passport number stored: is the passport number registered together with the animal transponder number? (Mandatory in EPN for 2016)

The table and the explanations above identify the advantages and disadvantages of each system listed. They show that none of the analysed I&R systems currently in use in EU Member States is ideal: no single system covers all needs and could therefore be adopted as a model of best practice. However, learning from experience and combining the most effective elements of the existing systems into one best practice system would benefit all parties involved, creating a system that is transparent, simple to understand, and easy to administer at low cost. It could be called the **European Best Practice System (EBPS)**.

## 3. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The table shows only a selection of countries that use typical systems. Most of the Member States that are not named have systems in use that partly follow one of the systems in the table or a modified version, or have no regulation at all.

The table highlights the fact that only relying on the two ISO standards (e.g. in EU Regulation 576/2013) is not sufficient to produce an EU-wide functioning system. It also shows that it is necessary to cross-check the validity of the identification and registration data of the passport stored in the national databases against the transponder code. This is the only way to provide a truly reliable basis on which the necessary control can be achieved and the illegal puppy trade can be stopped.

At present, the various ways of implementing ISO 11784 in different countries point out the disharmony in the national regulation and thus in the electronic identification of companion animals across the Member States. In consequence, the knowledge required to manage the current systems is different from what will be needed when a single harmonised structure is in place, and there is not yet communication between the responsible persons managing the national I&R systems.

In summary, it can be said that by far the safest approach is the use of the country code together with homologation, thus ensuring a double check of the transponder and guaranteeing that any control remains in the hands of the Member State (rather than in those of manufacturers).

## 4. ANALYSIS IN DETAIL

*Analysis for developing the optimum system by comparing the different systems currently in use, based on the following details:*

### The so-called French system (France, Japan)

Each manufacturer must apply to the Ministry and request homologation. Testing must then be carried out in the national reference laboratory. If a positive test result is communicated to the National Authority, the manufacturer receives the homologation code, which must be printed on each blister and must form part of the official identification code in each transponder number produced.

**Advantages**: This is a very secure way of monitoring the market, meaning it monitors the manufacturers and the products and makes it possible to gather information about trends in pet movements and imports.

**Disadvantages**: The present regulation does not take into consideration the need for guaranteed uniqueness, and would therefore need to be updated and made more secure in this respect. Furthermore, the passport number does not have to be stored in the single French database, I-Cad. The species code is not needed in practice.

### The so-called Wismans system (Netherlands, Denmark)

Each manufacturer must apply to the Ministry and provide information in order to be granted approval to use the country code. The system is named after its inventor, Wim Wismans, a former chair of the I&R subcommittee of ICAR. In the Netherlands, the codes produced must first be sent to a national database before the products can be delivered for distribution. In Denmark, there is no further monitoring.

**Advantages:** It works well for manufacturers with a full manufacturer code. The manufacturer is traceable, and there is a Competent Authority which takes responsibility.

**Disadvantages**: This method is already many years old and technically cannot be used without adaptation for the shared code manufacturers. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that each code is unique and no obligation to store passport numbers, which carries known risks.

### Swiss system (Switzerland, Serbia, Slovenia)

It is called the “Swiss system” because Switzerland was the first country to make the use of this code structure mandatory. Many years ago, it was introduced to regulate the uncontrolled use of the country code. A manufacturer who wants to sell in Switzerland must first apply to the National Dog Register for approval. The main control takes place at the registration level, as each medical person

in Switzerland has a national code which must be used for registration of the animal. In Switzerland, the National Dog Register checks each code to prevent duplication.

**Advantages:** It works well for manufacturers with a full manufacturer code. The manufacturer is traceable, and there is a Competent Authority which takes responsibility.

**Disadvantages**: The system cannot be used for shared code manufacturers and needs further security checks. Furthermore, there is no guarantee of uniqueness and there is no obligation to store passport numbers.

**Manufacturer codes only (Ireland, United Kingdom)**

Legislation prohibiting the use of the country code, as in the UK, Belgium or Ireland, forces the market to use only manufacturer-coded transponders. It does not take account of the fact that, without further checks such as those in place in Ireland, many animals will be identified using inappropriate microchip codes (e.g. difficult to read, no traceability of the manufacturer/provider, or even duplicate codes). This makes it very difficult for the users (veterinarians, implanters and pet owners) to distinguish between conforming and non-conforming products (transponders containing a microchip).

**Advantages**: The new Irish Microchipping of Dogs Regulations 2015 (SI 63/15) requires a validation check of the transponder before it is injected into the animal and the storing of the data in a database that is a full member of Europetnet, which means any Irish database can become a full member of Europetnet as it conforms to the Statutes and respects the Set of Rules. The system can also be used for shared code manufacturers.

**Disadvantages**: Without any additional checks of the code either at the manufacturer or registration level, the market remains uncontrolled and the number of inappropriate codes increases daily. There is no check on the conformity of the product or manufacturer, the system does not check for duplicate codes or guarantee uniqueness, and passport numbers do not have to be registered. This means that this system has to be supplemented by a regulation such as the Irish one.

**Country code without rules or with rules for some species (Germany, Hungary, Greece, etc.)**

A market is only regulated if ISO 11784 is applied to all animal species. Partial regulation for livestock is equivalent to no regulation for companion animals, and even the codes for livestock cannot be guaranteed to be reliable. This is the situation in a number of countries in Europe, where there are regulations in place for livestock which are based on EU legislation and which date from a time when identification was purely visual. In the majority of countries, there is no regulation for companion animals. In Hungary, the market has asked for horse identification (with country code) according to EU Regulation 504/2008, but there is no appointed person within the Competent Authority and no regulation to manage it.

**Advantages:** There is no advantage for dogs and cats in a country that provides no regulation for them or diverse regulations in many different states or regions.

**Disadvantages:** Codes set out in the regulation for horses and cattle are input into a transponder and injected into dogs. There is no traceability option, no duplicate code check, no guarantee of uniqueness, and no storage of passport numbers.

**Conclusions of the comparison**

**Summary of the current shortcomings**

1. In the absence of a national regulation for mandatory use of ISO standards, an overview of the market and any observation of movements and imports are impossible. The consequence for the market is confusion created by inadequate transponders and problems related to country codes and manufacturer codes.
2. A national regulation that is limited to only certain species amounts to no regulation at all for companion animals. Furthermore, dogs and cats might be microchipped using codes produced for other species.
3. Where only manufacturer codes are used, additional control measures are required. Most problems concerning the country code do not occur when the use of the manufacturer code alone is strictly forbidden.

**What should be done**

4. Before identifying an animal, the manufacturer code of the transponder should be checked to ensure that it conforms to ISO standards or, in case of country code use, that it conforms to the official national identification scheme. The requirement to store the animals' details in a database approved by the government prevents counterfeit products for the animals.
5. The obligations that have been mentioned are not taken seriously enough by the stakeholders at the national level. Therefore, the consequences of and penalties for non-compliance should be set out by the government to provide an effective deterrent.

**What this means in terms of the health risks to animals and humans**

Only points 4 and 5 above offer an adequate and reliable basis for rapid response in the event of a disease outbreak. Points 1 to 3 will always leave some room for the spread of disease.

**What this means for the internal market**

Points 1-5 either directly or indirectly allow the illegal trade and import of puppies from mass-production puppy farms as long as there is no harmonised and detailed regulation between all Member States.

## D. COMPONENTS FOR AN OPTIMUM EU-WIDE SYSTEM

The optimum system to ensure that I&R helps to reduce the illegal puppy trade and to minimise the risks to health should bring together all the lessons learned, combining and implementing the best practises. It should be called a **European Best Practice System (EBPS)**.

**This EBPS should have the following components:**

**On the EU level**, a decision should be made to introduce the following measures in the Member States:

a) Mandatory I&R on a legal basis
b) Mandatory use of the country code
c) Code of conduct with the following elements:
    - In all MS the mandatory country code, the animal code, the register, the manufacturer and the pet passport with its number and the owner's information should be combined

- In every MS there should be one contact point for the I&R of companion animals

**The Member States**, beyond the points listed above according to the EU rules, should implement the following:

a) Administrative homologation (low cost, without additional tests beyond ICAR tests), including a contract between the government (Competent Authority) and the homologated manufacturer, specifying the details of the code of conduct and the consequences of and penalties for misconduct
b) It is important to store the animal's single, unique EU passport number in the database together with the transponder number
c) The homologated manufacturer sends the produced codes to the Competent Authority for automatic validation and release of the batch
d) An additional control is the registration of the animal together with the name or ID of the person who has identified the animal
e) Storing the data of the breeder, of all successive traders, and finally of the owner
f) The designated local database that registers this information must comply with a code of conduct that at least includes access for the authorities 24 hours a day and a connection with a centralised system
g) The system must be supported by a national information campaign for future dog and cat owners – ideally an information package on responsible ownership. This campaign should cover all aspects of Identification and Registration and be aimed at both the general public and schools. In addition, in every Member State where owners are permitted to input the data themselves, the campaign should emphasise the need to input accurate database information and to keep it up-to-date (e.g. when a family with a dog changes address).

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3 December 2015