

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

PROPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

“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. Companion animals are sentient beings, as clearly stated in Art 13 TFEU.

The suffering of companion animals in the streets, sometimes in shelters, in illegal breeding activities, and during illegal transport needs to be addressed in a systematic way by proposing sustainable solution strategies. These should be implemented through clear legislative measures, based on a harmonised culture of dog and cat ownership across the EU and the Member States.

One of the key components of responsible ownership is visible responsibility by means of Identification and Registration (I&R) of companion animals. The benefits of an effective EU-wide I&R system include: reuniting a lost animal with its owner (at less cost for shelters or public authorities); 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.

In addition to high-level conferences, seminars, workshops and an expert working group, 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. Since 1 July 2015, the Special Focus of the websites has been I&R, featuring lively and interesting interviews and articles.

Specifically 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. The Group has established that an EU-wide harmonised I&R system is both necessary and feasible, and would help to solve the health and welfare problems of companion animals. It has produced a concrete plan to establish a harmonised system of I&R for companion animals on the EU level and on the national level. A longer and more detailed version of this briefing, which includes technical data, is also available. Here is a summary, 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

remind them to keep their information up-to-date on the system (e.g. Belgian campaign for dog and cat owners who change address)

3. Information, education, training

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 beginning. These should include the information that a prospective owner needs when deciding whether to adopt or buy a dog.

C. GENERAL TECHNICAL ASPECTS

An analysis of the main I&R systems currently in place in Europe shows that the safest approach is to use the country code together with homologation of manufacturers, thus ensuring that the transponder is cross-checked and guaranteeing that any control remains in the hands of the Member State. Furthermore, before an animal is identified, the manufacturer code of the transponder should be checked to ensure that it conforms to ISO standards or, in the 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.

To guarantee an EU-wide functioning system, enforcement should be strengthened by adequate and consistent penalties set by the governments for non-compliance and under the supervision of the EU Commission.

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 human and animal 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).