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PRESS RELEASE - Success for FOUR PAWS Wild? Me? Campaign: EU recognises that homeless cats and dogs are not wild

A major step forward for strays and companion animals in Europe has been reached within the last draft of the Animal Health Law

Since the first draft of the Animal Health Law, the international animal welfare organisation FOUR PAWS has warned of the misuse of the term “wild” when referring to stray animals and the legal consequences. Monday evening, MEP Marit Paulsen (SW, ALDE), European Parliament’s rapporteur on the Animal Health Law, now renamed “European law on Transmissible Animal Diseases”, and EU Commissioner Andriukaitis presented the outcome of the agreement between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. Even if the “wild” and “kept” definition will stay, a clause has been added, stating that stray animals are not wild animals, and that the critical definition of wild animals, as given by this description, will apply only to this law.

The new regulation will replace and encompass most of the present EU legislation on animal health. It distinguishes between those animals which are kept as pets and those which are stray without an owner kept, attributing homeless cats and dogs a lower level of legal protection than “kept” ones. It was feared that this could lead to legal grounds to kill strays. Now, by inserting the additional clause a compromise solution has been found and the draft explicitly distinguishing strays from the other non kept animals.

Moreover, the draft includes other improvements for animal welfare: The very first article of the Animal Health Law implements a safeguard clause in cases of stray population management programs, stating not only that these programs have to be performed in a humane way avoiding pain and distress for the animals, but also that they have to be proportionate with the health risk. It is also now required that these programs have to be implemented in a transparent way and have to include stakeholder consultation.

The most progressive initiative implemented by this new law is the mandatory registration of all professional breeders and sellers of animals. “We welcome this initiative which will help to reduce irresponsible breeding, and in turn reduce overpopulation and abandonment of companion animals”, says Pierre Sultana, Director of FOUR PAWS European Policy Office.

Finally, the new law redefines some terms in the transposition of the Pet Passport Regulation to try to reduce the possibilities of the illegal puppy trade under the non-commercial movement scheme.

Despite these improvements, some problems are still unresolved. FOUR PAWS has concerns regarding the proper enforcement of some unclear terms and notions of the law, such as “humane treatment” of animals. “This agreed version of the Animal Health Law does not meet all FOUR PAWS expectations, but it is already a major step forward for strays and companion animals in Europe”, says Sultana. By increasing control and redefining responsibilities, this new law may limit Member

States to adopt systematic culling programs of stray animals, which often take place without transparency and prior consultation with stakeholders and NGOs.

According to the Rapporteur, the final Parliamentary vote validating this compromise text should be a simple formality and should occur in November this year.

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