

Scottish Animal Welfare Commission

Annual report of SAWC activity 2022-2023

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1. Word from the Chair

It is my great pleasure to introduce this third annual review of the activities of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC), reporting on our activities from October 2022 to September 2023. The SAWC Commissioners meet together on four occasions per year, which are now mostly in person and which have been very useful for detailed discussions. We also continue to have several working groups, which meet regularly, usually online as time-efficient methods of meeting and which are focused on addressing specific animal welfare issues of relevance to Scotland. As you can see in this report, the Commission continues to be very active in developing its work to address specific issues, and publishing reports as will be detailed below.

The work of the SAWC this year has considered a number of important welfare issues for wildlife and companion animals, with three published reports considering the welfare of farmed fish, of companion dogs and racing greyhounds. We have also published a position paper on the important issue of the welfare of wildlife, and continue to address other issues where there is a timely or important need to express an opinion for Scotland's animals. Although SAWC takes guidance and requests from Scottish Government and others, it is independent in forming its workplan, and any recommendations are arrived at on the basis of evidence, considered from the point of view of animal welfare costs or benefits. SAWC also provides an opinion from the perspective of animal welfare on various consultations relating to the use of animals, or where proposed legislative changes may impact on animals' lives.

SAWC has also continued to develop strong working links with related groups. The SAWC Chair and secretariat participated in the annual EuroFAWC meeting in June, and are developing plans to host the next meeting in Edinburgh. SAWC members regularly attend meetings of the Animal Welfare Committee (formerly Farm Animal Welfare Committee), and SAWC invites the Chair of AWC to attend SAWC plenary meetings. SAWC looks forward to continuing close and supportive contact with AWC and with the new Animal Sentience Committee. SAWC also maintains close working relationships with the Wild Animal Welfare Committee, which contributes to reports on wildlife matters. These contacts ensure that SAWC is able to provide a strong and impartial view on animal welfare for Scottish farm, companion and wild animals.

2. Introduction and Terms of Reference

1. The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) was established by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission Regulations 2020, made under section 36 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. The function of providing advice on the protection of wildlife under section 23 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has been assigned by Ministerial declaration.

Further information on the Commission, including reports and minutes of previous meetings, is published when available on the [SAWC web page](#).

2. SAWC's terms of reference are to focus on the welfare of wild and companion animals in Scotland while also providing scientific and ethical advice to the Scottish Government. The Commission only considers areas that are within the normal current remit of the UK Animal Welfare Committee and the UK Zoo Expert Committee where these relate to the overall responsibility to consider the welfare needs of sentient animals in all areas of Scottish Government policy or at the specific request of the Scottish Ministers. The Commission do not consider matters that are reserved to the UK Government, including the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures.

The Commission provides written reports and opinions to Scottish Ministers giving practical recommendations based on scientific evidence and ethical considerations on the welfare of sentient animals in Scotland, and the impact of policy on welfare.

3. This review provides an update on the work the Commission has undertaken since publishing its [first review in 2021](#) and [second review in 2022](#), including reports published and continuing activity. This fulfils the requirement for an annual report in regulation 14 of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission Regulations 2020, which states that:

- The Commission must, as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year prepare and publish a report on the exercise of its functions during that year and send a copy of the report to the Scottish Ministers.
- The Scottish Ministers must lay a copy of the report before the Scottish Parliament.
- It is for the Commission to determine the form and content of each report.

3. Ways of Working

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) has been established to provide independent advice to Scottish Ministers on the welfare of sentient animals, primarily wildlife and companion animals, with particular reference to:

- how the welfare needs of sentient animals are being met by devolved policy;
- possible legislative and non-legislative routes to further protect the welfare of sentient animals; and
- the research requirements to provide an evidence base for future policy development.

SAWC provides written reports and opinions to Scottish Ministers (and to such others as Scottish Ministers may direct), giving practical recommendations based on scientific evidence and ethical considerations on the welfare of sentient animals in Scotland, and the impact of policy on welfare. It is required to publish any advice it provides, which is available on the [SAWC website](#).

The Commission is required to submit an Annual Report to Scottish Ministers, which they must lay before the Scottish Parliament.

Members of SAWC are appointed in a personal capacity on the basis of their particular expertise and experience in aspects of animal welfare, which they use to consider welfare issues of relevance to animals in Scotland. They do not act as representatives of their employer or any other organisation with which they may be associated, neither are they remunerated by the Scottish Government. A [Register of Members' Interests](#) is publicly available on the SAWC website.

SAWC provides advice on matters (i) referred to it by Scottish Ministers, (ii) referred to it by such other persons as Scottish Ministers may direct, and (iii) as the Commission itself considers appropriate. It is required to prepare an annual work plan, which must be approved by Scottish Ministers.

Plenary meetings of SAWC are held at least four times a year. These are generally physical meetings, as circumstances allow, although members unable to attend in person may do so virtually. A record of members' attendance is included in the Annual Report. Officials from the Scottish Government Animal Welfare Team are invited to attend each meeting, with other Scottish Government officials invited to be represented, depending on each meeting's agenda.

In addition to the Annual Report, which includes a general review of developments in policy and legislation, so far as they impact on the welfare of sentient animals in Scotland, SAWC produces four types of outputs: 1) short responses to specific questions from the Minister responsible for animal welfare or other members of Scottish Government; 2) letters to Ministers on specific areas of welfare where members of SAWC feel their advice will be useful in decision-making; 3) responses to Scottish Government public consultations; and 4) following a detailed inquiry by the Commission, substantial reports which focus on a specific topic.

Responses to consultations, queries and letters to Ministers are usually drafted by an *ad hoc* sub-committee, although information may be sought from relevant bodies as required.

Substantial reports are prepared by Working Groups drawn from SAWC membership, but will usually require additional views and inputs from outside the Commission. For issues involving wildlife, SAWC meets with NatureScot at the inception of a working group to discuss the issue and gain background information on work to date on the area. Similarly, other agencies, such as the Animal and Plant Health Agency, may also be involved in initial meetings to provide similar background to an issue. In some instances, SAWC may co-opt an external member to a Working Group, where there is a need for additional independent expertise, although all decisions are made by SAWC alone. In evidence gathering, SAWC will approach relevant stakeholders for written and/or oral views on the issue under consideration.

All opinions, advice and recommendations provided by SAWC represent the independent, collective view of the Commission.

4. Work Plan and Work Group Activity

In the past 12 months the Commission has held three plenary meetings – in January, May and August 2023, with a fourth planned for November 2023. Minutes and records of attendance are published routinely and held in the Documents section of the Commission's [web page](#).

The Commission published its [initial work plan](#) in July 2020. Annual refreshed plans have since been published, including the [most recent](#) in July 2023. Smaller working groups lead the projects and also discuss some areas identified for consideration in the medium term. Updates on the activity and output of these groups is as follows (Where reports are referenced, further information can be found in the “Publications” section):

Aquaculture

The working group was formed to consider the welfare of farmed fish in Scotland, including to provide an opinion on the welfare aspects of practices that are required to make the sector sustainable. The group initially considered the welfare issues arising for farmed Atlantic salmon, and wild animals when protecting farmed fish from predation by seals (such as use of acoustic deterrents). Evidence-gathering sessions included a visit to a salmon farm, a literature review, surveying and interviewing a range of industry experts, and conducting an ethical review.

The working group published its report on acoustic deterrent devices on 6 March 2023.

The working group is now focusing on the welfare issues surrounding the use of cleaner fish in salmon farming.

Dog Training

The working group was initially established to review whether dog trainers and dog training methods should be regulated. The group tasked itself with firstly reviewing and providing an initial report on the welfare issues associated with the use of electronic collars on dogs. Evidence gathering included engagement with a range of stakeholders, a demonstration of dog training practices and a review of the available literature on the issue.

The working group published its report on e-collars on 11 April 2023.

The working group is now focusing on the welfare issues surrounding other aversive training devices.

Responsible Cat Ownership

A working group was set up at the beginning of 2023 to consider the welfare issues relating to domestic cat ownership, including of microchipping, neutering, vaccination, feral cats and the impacts on wildcat populations. The working group expects to report on its findings early in 2024.

Sentience

A Sentience Sub-Committee was set up at the end of 2021, and continues to assist the other members of SAWC in filtering and prioritising issues relating to animal sentience, as well as assembling evidence in relation to fish sentience.

Wildlife Welfare

The Scottish Government has a Programme for Government commitment to publish 'a strategic approach to wildlife management that puts animal welfare at the centre while protecting public health and economic and conservation considerations.'

SAWC continues to engage with NatureScot on their wildlife welfare principles, which forms part of this commitment. The working group has also begun to consider the welfare issues for wild animals associated with rewilding and translocation.

Greyhound racing

Petitions on banning racing greyhounds increased awareness of potential welfare concerns.

SAWC formed a working group to undertake more research and fully consider the available evidence, in order to reach a balanced conclusion by the end of February 2023.

The working group published its opinion on greyhound racing in Scotland on 28 February 2023.

Local authorities handling animal welfare issues

A working group was formed to consider reviewing how different authorities deal with animal welfare issues, whether there are experts who can assess welfare and whether any future recommendations could feasibly be met by the local authorities.

Slaughter and mobile abattoirs

A working group was formed in September 2023 to review longer journey times and other welfare issues related to declining availability of local slaughter facilities.

Other areas of the work plan that may be considered in the future:

Wildcat reintroduction

Opportunity for SAWC to review policy or provide an opinion on welfare issues at some point.

Performing animals and animal encounters (potentially including therapy animals)

There is current Scottish Government engagement with stakeholders in this area, but SAWC could provide an opinion on welfare of animals used under these different types of management, including the lives of these animals when not on exhibit/in use.

Potential areas over a longer time scale:

Codes of practice vs. industry guidance

Provide an opinion on how information can be best disseminated and its impact in practice. Role for SAWC in reviewing revised or new versions of these (alongside activities of AWC), particularly those falling under areas of particular Scottish concerns such as aquaculture.

Welfare of horses kept for racing

Currently no plans to look at this. May respond in future if specific questions from the Minister in this area.

5. Published Advice

[Greyhounds Report](#) – 28 February 2023

In May 2022 SAWC responded to an enquiry by the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, with an [opinion on the welfare of greyhound racing in Scotland and on unlicensed greyhound racing tracks operating in Scotland](#).

SAWC subsequently produced the report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland.

[Report on the use of acoustic deterrent devices in salmon farming](#) – 6 March 2023

SAWC produced a report on the use of acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) in salmon farming to control predation by seals and their wider effects on wildlife.

[E-collars Report](#) – 11 April 2023

SAWC produced a report on the use of handheld remote-controlled training devices (e-collars) in dog training.

[Letter to RAI Committee on alternatives to glue traps for rodent control](#) – 7 July 2023

SAWC sent a letter to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on alternatives to glue traps for rodent control, following an earlier Parliamentary evidence gathering session on the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill, which SAWC attended.

[Position paper on wildlife and animal welfare](#) – 29 August 2023

SAWC produced a position paper on wildlife and animal welfare.

[Review of Scottish Government activity affecting the welfare of animals, as sentient beings](#) – 9 October 2023

SAWC produced a report reviewing the delivery of animal welfare commitments made by the Scottish Government over the past twelve months, including its policy and legislative proposals.

6. Consultation responses

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission responded to six consultations:

- **Consultation on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill Legislative Consent Memorandum – January 2023**

SAWC's response is available to view on [the Scottish Parliament's web page](#).

- **Consultation on the Shark Fins Bill Legislative Consent Memorandum – January 2023**

SAWC's response is available to view on [the Scottish Parliament's web page](#).

- **Consultation on the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill – May 2023**

SAWC's response is available to view on [the Scottish Parliament's web page](#).

- **Consultation on the Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill – August 2023**

SAWC's response is available to view on [the Scottish Parliament's web page](#).

- **Consultation on the licensing of activities involving animals – September 2023**

SAWC's response to this consultation will be made available to the public in due course on [the Scottish Government's consultations web page](#).

- **Consultation on the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill: use of snares and powers of Scottish SPCA inspectors – October 2023**

SAWC's response to this consultation will be made available to the public in due course on [the Scottish Government's consultations web page](#).

RAI Committee Meetings

- SAWC was represented at a [RAI Committee meeting on 29 March 2023](#). SAWC provided its views on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland and the recommendations set out in its report.
- SAWC was represented at a [RAI Committee meeting on 14 June 2023](#). This was an evidence session on the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill.

7. Conclusions and Forward Look

In its third year, SAWC has addressed a range of important issues for the welfare of animals in Scotland, further developed its relationships with relevant bodies across Europe and published key recommendations on a number of areas relating to the welfare of wild, farmed and companion animals. It is currently addressing a number of important issues through its working groups, which are gathering evidence and providing opinions on a range of animal welfare issues. SAWC continues to provide expertise in addressing specific welfare-related consultations, and to provide information to the Scottish Ministers and Committees on important welfare issues.

As the work of SAWC develops, the welfare issues being tackled are complex and may be contested where the welfare of more than one sentient species may be in conflict, or where welfare issues conflict with other concerns. Welfare issues and recommendations to improve welfare may also challenge established norms of behaviour or animal use. However, as SAWC considers these areas, now and in the future, it will rely on the strength of evidence, and take into consideration the experiences and expertise of those who work in the relevant sectors. SAWC strives to remain independent with animal welfare at the forefront of its decision-making at all times.

Appendix I – Membership of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission Members are:

- Professor Cathy Dwyer from Scotland's Rural College and the University of Edinburgh (Chair)
- Dr Harvey Carruthers, veterinary surgeon
- Mike Radford, lawyer specialising in Animal Welfare
- Paula Boyden, Veterinary Director at Dogs Trust
- Professor Marie Haskell, Professor in Animal Welfare Science at Scotland's Rural College
- Dr James Yeates, Chief Executive Officer of World Federation for Animals
- Libby Anderson, policy advisor to OneKind
- Professor Simon Girling, Head of Veterinary Services, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
- Mike Flynn, Chief Superintendent at the Scottish SPCA
- Dr Pete Goddard, veterinary surgeon
- Dr Andrew Kitchener, Principal Curator of Vertebrates at National Museums Scotland
- Dr Ellie Wigham, Lecturer in Veterinary Public Health, University of Glasgow

Full biographies are available on [SAWC's website](#).

Appendix II – Register of Interests

An up to date register of interests of the members of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission can be found on [SAWC's website](#).

Appendix III – Contact Details

The Commission is contactable through the Scottish Government's Secretariat Support:

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