

Stronger EU-level protection needed for farm animals during live transportation

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Live transportation is a common but stressful experience for farm animals. Most jurisdictions including the EU have regulations to protect animals from harm, but there is increasing concern that these are not fit for purpose.

Analysing where existing legislation does or does not meet current scientific evidence can help EU policymakers identify where to focus their efforts [in proposed updates](#), to better protect animals during transportation.

About the research

During transportation, animals are typically deprived of food, water and rest.

Factors such as fitness, journey length, climate, and space can all negatively impact animal welfare.

Although the EU and other jurisdictions have implemented regulations to protect animals during transit for decades, [public reports](#) of significant failures suggest farm animals are not adequately safeguarded (including when exported to third countries).

Institutions such as the European Parliament have repeatedly [emphasized weaknesses in current regulations](#)^[1].

In a recent Eurobarometer survey of public attitudes to animal welfare, 84% of respondents felt farm animals need stronger protections^[2].

We analysed current live animal transportation regulations in five English-speaking jurisdictions ([collectively representing 25% of animals slaughtered for meat](#) in the world) with respect to 4 key factors:

- fitness for transport, journey duration, climatic conditions, space allowance.

This approach allowed us to identify policy gaps and best regulatory frameworks, which can provide guidance on how to improve EU policies currently in development.

Policy recommendations for [2023/0448/COD](#)

- Long distance transport could be further reduced by favouring alternatives (e.g. mobile abattoirs; more local abattoirs, meat transportation), consistent with the [Commission Delegated Regulation 2024/1141](#) on meat hygiene requirements.
- Define more clearly what makes an animal unfit for transport by establishing a comprehensive list of clinical signs for each species (as in [Health of Animals Regulations \(C.R.C., c.296\)](#) Canada). The EU proposal still relies on vague language, which may result in variation when assessing fitness for transport and ultimately lead to transporting unfit animals^[3].
- Clearly identify vulnerable animals (e.g., unweaned, end-of-career or pregnant females that are considered as fit for transport) and set shorter and more comfortable transport conditions, regardless of whether the truck is equipped with a feeding system or not. Journeys over 8hrs for 'unweaned and other vulnerable animals' should be banned, as suggested by the European Commission in 2021^[4].
- The 9 hours limit rule should not just apply to when animals are transported for slaughter. The exceptions to this rule currently considered in the proposal (e.g., no species-specific slaughterhouse available nearby) appear very difficult to enforce, and may seriously limit the effect of the policy.
- Long journey durations should only be granted if animals can effectively drink, feed and rest during transport, and on a case-by-case basis. Livestock may not lie down and fail to use or access drinkers during transportation^[5] therefore long transportation have an important toll on these animals.
- Live farm animal export to [non-EU countries](#) should be banned (as in the [United Kingdom](#) since 2024 and [New Zealand](#) since 2023).
- Time at sea must be counted as part of the journey time.

Key findings

Our comparative analysis looked at current live animal transportation regulations in five English-speaking jurisdictions: Australia (2012, 2016), Canada (2019), New Zealand (2018), the EU (2004), and the USA (1873, 1994).

We compared these policies with the available scientific evidence looking at how transportation affects the welfare of farm animals. This comparative analysis highlighted areas where regulations were fit for purpose (e.g. they align with the current scientific evidence) and areas where significant gaps exist.

Overall, several important issues are not addressed, or addressed using vague language or do not follow the latest scientific evidence.

- Unclear definitions or vague language means unfit animals may be [transported](#).
- Compromised and vulnerable animals are more likely to experience negative effects associated with transportation, but only rarely receive adequate additional protection.
- We found that only Canada sets up a list of 'compromised' animals (e.g., an animal that has acute frostbite) that must be transported in more comfortable conditions (e.g., to the nearest place, other than an assembly centre).
- Lengthy journeys make it worse. Except in some rare instances, no jurisdictions adopt 'absolute' maximum total journey durations (animals can be transported in several bouts indefinitely).
- Maximum journey durations without food, water and rest are sometimes provided, but these are often too long (e.g. 36 hours for cattle in Canada).
- Most jurisdictions recommend avoiding animal transport during extreme climatic conditions, but only the EU sets temperature thresholds, which are neither sufficient, nor species-specific and only apply to long journeys.
- Some animals rarely access drinkers or change position. However, space allowances are rarely clearly defined and do not consider these important animal needs.



Image: Sabine, Pixabay

Further information

Duval E, Lecorps B, von Keyserlingk MAG. 2024 Are regulations addressing farm animal welfare issues during live transportation fit for purpose? A multi-country jurisdictional check. *R. Soc. Open Sci.* 11: 231072.

<https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.231072>

[1] Committee of Inquiry on the Protection of Animals during Transport 2020–2022, European Parliament

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/archives/9/anit/home/>

[2] European Union. 2023 Special Eurobarometer 533 on Animal Welfare

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2996>

[3] European Commission. 2023/0448 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/procedure/EN/2023_448

[4] European Commission. 2021 Inception impact assessment, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation_en

[5] B. L. Nielsen, L. Dybkjær and M. S. Herskin. 2010. Road transport of farm animals: effects of journey duration on animal welfare. *Animal* (2011), 5:3, pp 415–427

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