

Workshop 7

Implications of sentience for all areas of industry

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Animals are used in a huge variety of industries, including farming and food, developing pharmaceuticals (human and veterinary) and entertainment.

The draft Sentience Bill requires Ministers to have 'regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy'. Given that animal sentience and welfare needs have been formally recognised at this level (regardless of the final wording and implementation of the Bill), what implications should this have on the way in which industries view and 'use' animals and the approaches they take to assessing and addressing welfare issues?

Industries will have many issues that need to be taken into account when considering how much they can - or should - take account of the welfare of sentient animals in their policies and practices. These could include economics, customer preferences, logistics, health and safety rules.

Whilst policy makers can and do implement binding baseline legislation around how animals in different contexts should be treated, industries can (and in some areas, do) choose to go above this and consider issues beyond protection of basic physical health and the environment.

Given industries' widespread impact on animals and their ability to define and implement their own voluntary guidelines on animal treatment, please discuss the following questions:

Questions:

1. Which industries do you think are already paying regard to the needs of the sentient animals they use? How are they going about this (please provide examples)?
2. Which industries do you think would find it difficult to pay greater regard to sentient animals' needs? Why? What are the specific challenges?
3. How could the industries listed in Question 2 go about overcoming the challenges to strengthening their approach to providing for the needs for sentient animals? How - and by whom - could they be helped in achieving this?
4. How can success of industry in providing for the needs of sentient animals and/or in avoiding negative impact on them be assessed? What sort of criteria should be used and how could benchmarking be undertaken and implemented?

Summary of the discussion:

The use of animals in the farming started the discussion, with the number of animals involved being cited as an important factor. The growth in intensive systems, in response to the need to feed a growing human population, was considered an issue that is having an increasingly negative impact on welfare. However, there has been an emergence of higher welfare schemes, positive welfare changes in legislation, farm infrastructure and technological developments (e.g. robotic milking) over the last 20 years, so welfare could also be viewed as improving. On balance, it may be the case that some areas have improved whilst others have got worse. The UK farming industry may claim they take account of sentience already and that UK farm animal welfare standards are better than those adopted in other countries. It was questioned whether the current treaty on sentience has really made any difference to how farm animals are treated, as the main developments in welfare (e.g. banning sow stalls and conventional battery cages for hens) were more likely driven by public

concern than by government intervention. Concerns were raised regarding the current protection for fish and crustaceans.

Animal use in research could be seen as lower priority in terms of fewer animals being used.

It was noted that significant suffering can be caused to pets and that the sporting industries can also cause suffering to the animals involved.

Land use for buildings and roads was cited as having a significant impact on wild animals and, consequently, planning applications should take account of impacts on wildlife (and their habitats). Further, conflicts between farming and wild animals were mentioned, e.g. wild animal control (for disease and predation purposes). It was stated that there should be more science based regulation in place to better account for these aspects. A focus on sentience could help ensure that culling practices are better considered. Regarding the government's proposed agriculture subsidy payments for public goods, it was proposed that wild animal management control practices that took account of sentience could qualify for such payments. Concerns regarding 'leisure' fishing was raised, as well as commercial fishing - especially in relation to killing practices.

There was a general discussion about whether we could, and should, rear animals that are less intelligent and may therefore suffer (in some respects) less. However, this was not considered central to the discussion, as sentience and intelligence are not inevitably linked. There was also discussion regarding what sentience actually means and how it is defined and whether a sentience Bill is necessary to drive welfare improvements. Whether such a Bill could limit progress was also mentioned, and it was proposed that, 'paying full regard to animal welfare' could be better than using the term sentience. Specifying sentience may also mean less protection for those animals not currently considered sentient and proof of sentience could delay the provision of adequate protection. The term 'welfare' was seen as broader than sentience and could therefore help with this.

Key points:

- There was debate about the pros and cons of defining and using the term sentience, but there was nevertheless agreement that animal welfare could be improved in all industries. This includes those industries that may not be widely recognised as having an impact on animal welfare. For example, constructing new buildings affects the welfare of wild animals, and planning applications could pay regard to this (in addition to environmental impact assessments).
- Sentience conversation brought about a deeper discussion on possible policy impacts in areas other than just farming, which will require a need to engage/involve consumers and citizens in policy changes.

Workshop held at:
Animal Sentience: science, policy and 'real world' application
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