

## Widespread breaches of pig welfare laws in the EU

### Briefing

September 2013

**In 2013 Compassion in World Farming (Compassion) investigated pig farms in six Member States: Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Cyprus and Poland. We visited 45 farms. All but one of these farms were breaking important parts of EU law on the welfare of pigs (the Pigs Directive).<sup>1</sup>**

Most of the pigs we saw were kept in dreadful conditions – crammed into barren pens where there was simply nothing for these intelligent, energetic creatures to do. Many of the farms were filthy. In Italy most farms we saw were so dirty that some pigs were simply covered in slurry. In Ireland we found pigs covered in flies and excrement. Sick and injured pigs were rarely given any treatment. In Ireland we saw pigs with festering wounds and hernias and others that had been left to die where they lay.

#### Which laws were being broken?

We focussed on the two provisions below as, if they were complied with, factory farming would no longer be possible and the pigs would experience much improved welfare.

**Requirement to provide enrichment materials:** The Pigs Directive requires pigs to be given enrichment materials such as straw or wood so that they can engage in their natural activities of investigating and manipulating their surroundings.

**Ban on routine tail docking:** In natural conditions pigs are highly active, spending 75% of their day rooting, foraging and exploring.<sup>2</sup> Such activities are impossible for factory farmed pigs. Bored and frustrated, they turn to the only other 'thing' in their bare pens: the tails of other pigs. They begin to chew and then bite those tails.

To prevent tail biting, farmers slice off (dock) part of the piglet's tail. However, scientific research shows that the correct way to prevent tail biting is not to dock the tails but to keep the pigs in good conditions, above all to give them straw or some similar material to enable rooting and investigation behaviour. In recognition of this, the Pigs Directive has since 2003 prohibited routine tail docking.

Tail docking is painful. Moreover, it props up factory farming. If farmers really could not dock they would have to keep the pigs in good conditions to avoid tail biting.

#### Investigation findings

The vast majority of pigs seen during the investigation were being farmed illegally in breach of the Pigs Directive.

**Proportion of farms in breach of Pig Directive’s (i) requirement that enrichment materials must be provided & (ii) ban on routine tail docking**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of farms visited</b>	<b>Prevalence of tail docking (% of farms visited)</b>	<b>No or ineffective enrichment materials (% of farms visited)</b>
<b>Cyprus</b>	10	100%	100%
<b>Czech Republic</b>	8	87.5%	87.5%
<b>Ireland</b>	5	100%	100%
<b>Italy</b>	11	100%	100%
<b>Poland</b>	2	100%	100%
<b>Spain</b>	9	100%	100%

In addition, many of the pigs were being kept in filthy conditions.

**The pig sector & Member State authorities have known about these problems for many years – and have failed to take effective action**

In 2008 and 2009 Compassion conducted an investigation in a large selection of pig farms across Europe. In all we visited 74 farms in Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and UK. Most of the pigs seen during this investigation were being farmed illegally with breaches of the Pigs Directive being commonplace.

In addition, reports by the Commission’s Food and Veterinary Office have repeatedly drawn attention to non-compliance with the law requiring enrichment materials to be provided and the ban on routine tail docking. Also a report by the European Food Safety Authority in 2007 found that over 90% of EU piglets were tail docked. A recent survey of abattoirs in Ireland and Northern Ireland found 99.1% of the pigs were tail docked.

**Two thousand million pigs**

That is the number of pigs that would have enjoyed better welfare if the EU’s pig sector had complied with the laws on enrichment and tail docking since they came into force in 2003.

It appears that at least 90% of EU pigs are tail docked despite the ban on routine docking. At least 80% of EU pigs are not given effective enrichment materials; Compassion’s investigations suggest that this figure may be higher.

The EU rears 250 million pigs a year – that’s 2500 million since these laws came into force. At least 80% (probably more) have been routinely tail docked and reared without enrichment materials. 80% of 2500 million is 2000 million.

That’s two thousand million pigs that have suffered unnecessarily due to the pig sector’s refusal to respect the law. This sector is out of control, behaving as if it is above the law.

<sup>1</sup> Council Directive 2008/120 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs

<sup>2</sup> Stolba A. and Woodgush D.G.M., 1989. The behaviour of pigs in a semi-natural environment. Animal Protection **48**: 419-425