



17 February 2025

Olivér Várhelyi  
 Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare  
 European Commission

Please reply to:  
 Peter Stevenson OBE  
 Chief Policy Advisor  
 Compassion in World Farming  
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Dear Commissioner,

### EU legislation on the tail docking of pigs and the provision of enrichment materials

It is now 31 years since the EU laws banning the routine tail docking of pigs and requiring them to be given effective enrichment materials came into force. The undersigned organisations are concerned that this legislation continues to be poorly enforced in the vast majority of Member States.

Commission audit reports show that in many Member States the vast majority of pigs continue to be tail docked. Indeed, in 2021, the Commission stated that ‘tail-docking of pigs is a routine practice in 26 out of 28 Member States and approximately 150 million pigs annually are subject to this practice’;<sup>1</sup> this figure was calculated pre-Brexit.

Moreover, in many farms pigs are not provided with effective enrichment; they are simply given metal chains and/or some plastic objects.

The issues of tail docking and enrichment are receiving considerable attention. Brill has recently published a multi-author book on [Tail-biting in pigs](#). In its 2022 Scientific Opinion on the welfare of pigs EFSA concluded that tail docking ‘is not necessary if husbandry practices and management are appropriate’ and recommended that ‘tail docking should not be

<sup>1</sup> Commission Staff Working Document. Evaluation of the European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-2015 (SWD(2021) 77 final). Brussels, 31.3.2021 SWD(2021) 76 final

performed.’ EFSA identified the following factors as important to prevent tail biting: the provision of enrichment materials such as straw, increased space allowance, and low levels of ammonia. In addition, EFSA recommended that ‘All pigs should be provided with effective enrichment’.

This legislation on tail docking and enrichment is a core component of the EU’s work to secure good welfare standards for pigs. Respect for the legislation would deliver substantial improvements for pig welfare. A Technical Report prepared for EFSA stressed ‘an intact curly tail may well be the single most important animal-based welfare indicator for weaned, growing and finishing pigs (at herd level). In addition, it stands for high-quality management and respect for the integrity of the pig’.<sup>2</sup> The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe has adopted a position paper that stresses the need to move away from tail docking.

We recognise that the Commission has taken several steps to press the Member States to achieve much improved compliance with this legislation such as the 2016 Recommendation and the requirement for Member States to produce action plans. However, despite this compliance and enforcement in most Member States are poor.

**As the guardian of the Treaties, the Commission has a clear legal mandate to ensure the uniform application and enforcement of EU law. Allowing this 31-year pattern of non-compliance to persist risks undermining the credibility of EU legal standards and the Commission’s role in upholding them.** It is, moreover, inconsistent with Article 13 TFEU for the Commission to fail to take effective action to secure compliance with the law on tail docking as Article 13 requires the EU, when implementing its policies on agriculture, to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals.

**This is not a mere technicality; persistent non-compliance with this law raises serious concerns about the integrity of EU regulatory enforcement and the rule of law.** If enforced, tens of millions of pigs would have better welfare; they would be spared the pain of tail docking. Also, if farmers had to comply with the requirement that before carrying out tail docking, they must first try to prevent tail biting by changing inadequate environmental conditions or management systems, pigs would likely benefit from a range of improvements such as the provision of effective enrichment materials, more space within the pens and at feeding troughs, an end to the use of fully slatted floors and reduced ammonia levels.

We urge the Commission to redouble its efforts to persuade the pig sector to respect this legislation and the Member States to enforce it. Given the persistent failure of certain Member States to take meaningful action, we believe the time has come for the Commission to initiate infringement proceedings to uphold the obligations enshrined in EU law. Continued inaction may set a concerning precedent for the enforcement of animal welfare legislation across the Union.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you how the Commission intends to ensure enforcement of the ban on routine tail docking and the requirement to provide enrichment materials. If no meaningful progress is made, we may have to explore additional avenues to ensure that the obligations under EU law are upheld.

We believe that the Commission has completed assessments of the action plans on docking that it required the Member States to make. We would be grateful if you would let us see these assessments.

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<sup>2</sup> Spoolder H *et al.*, 2011. Technical Report submitted to EFSA. Preparatory work for the future development of animal based measures for assessing the welfare of pigs. Report 2: Preparatory work for the future development of animal based measures for assessing the welfare of weaned, growing and fattening pigs including aspects related to space allowance, floor types, tail biting and need for tail docking.

Finally, we request access to the data and information provided to the Commission by the Member States regarding the steps they are taking to secure compliance with this legislation. Transparency in enforcement measures is essential to ensuring that EU law is applied consistently. If non-compliance continues, the lack of enforcement could be construed as a failure to uphold EU legal obligations, warranting further scrutiny.

Yours sincerely,

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Anima International, Kirsty Henderson, President  
Animal Law Italia, Alessandro Ricciuti, CEO  
Animal Protection Denmark, Britta Riis, CEO  
Animal Welfare Association of Iceland, Andrés Ingi Jónsson, Executive Director  
Animalia, Heidi Kivekäs, Executive Director  
Animals Australia, Glenys Oogjes, Executive Officer  
Animals International, Glenys Oogjes, Executive Officer  
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Compassion in World Farming, Peter Stevenson OBE, Chief Policy Advisor  
Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V., Thomas Schröder, President  
Dier&Recht, Frederieke Schouten, CEO and Veterinarian  
Dierenbescherming, Ellen Bien, CEO  
Djurskyddet Sverige (Animal Welfare Sweden), Emma Brunberg, Policy Advisor, Ph.D.  
Dyrevernalliansen (Norwegian Animal Protection Alliance), Anton Krag, CEO and Zoologist  
Ethical Farming Ireland, Caroline Rowley, CEO  
Ethical Treatment of Humans and Animals, Alma Ljubica Kovacevic, President  
Eyes on Animals, Lesley Moffat, Director  
Four Paws, Joe Moran, Director FOUR PAWS Belgium  
Frente Animal, Ana Bordalo, Political Officer  
GGI - Gyvūnų gerovės iniciatyvos (Animal Welfare Initiatives), Beatričė Vaitiekūnaitė, CEO  
Hellenic Animal Welfare Federation, Irini Molfessi, Chair of the Board  
Humane Society International/Europe, Joanna Swabe, Senior Director of Public Affairs  
INTERcids, María Gonzalez Lacabex, President  
La Fondation Droit Animal, Éthique et Sciences, Louis Schweitzer, President  
LAV, Lorenza Bianchi, Head of Food Transition  
People for Animal Rights Germany, Christina Ledermann, CEO  
Project 1882, Benny Andersson, CEO  
Rabbit Welfare, Rae Walters, CEO  
SEY Animal Welfare Finland, Pihla Markkola, Head Expert (Farm Animals)  
The Swedish Association for the Protection of Animals, Lillemor Wodmar, President  
Varkens in Nood, Sanne Roelofs, Behavioural biologist  
Wakker Dier, Leonie Vestering, Campaign Manager  
World Animal Protection, Roger Pettersson, CEO World Animal Protection Sweden