

Scottish Animal Welfare Commission

Annual Report of SAWC Activity 2020-2021

15 October 2021



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**The Scottish Animal Welfare
Commission Secretariat
Animal Health and Welfare Team
P-Spur, Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
Edinburgh EH11 3XD**

SAWC.Secretariat@gov.scot

<https://www.gov.scot/groups/scottish-animal-welfare-commission/>

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Word from the Chair

I am very pleased to be able to introduce this first annual review of the activities of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) since its inception in June 2020. SAWC began under difficult global circumstances, and the Commissioners have still not yet been able to hold a face to face meeting to discuss activities. However, the Commission has been very active in developing a workplan, setting up relevant work groups to address specific issues, and publishing reports as will be detailed below.

The initial actions of SAWC have been to focus on issues they perceive to be very timely, and relevant to delivering on their remit, such as developing a working definition of animal sentience. Other issues that were also considered this year were those where there was 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 the 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 has also developed strong working links with related groups, through regular attendance at meetings of the Animal Welfare Committee (formerly Farm Animal Welfare Committee), invitations to the Chair of AWC to attend SAWC plenary meetings, close working with the Wild Animal Welfare Committee, and membership of EURO-FAWC. Through these links and contacts, SAWC intends to be able to provide a strong and impartial view on animal welfare for Scottish farm, companion and wild animals.

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; see <https://www.gov.scot/groups/scottish-animal-welfare-commission/>

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 will only consider 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 will not consider matters that are reserved to the UK Government, including the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures.

The Commission will provide 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 its formal establishment in June 2020, including reports published and on-going 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.

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 will only consider areas that are within the normal current remit of the UK Animal Welfare Committee or the UK Zoo Expert Committee where these relate to the overall responsibility of the Scottish Government or at the specific request of the Minister. SAWC will not consider matters that are reserved to the UK Government, including the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures.

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 its [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 4 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.

Work Plan and Work Group Activity

To date, the Commission has held 6 plenary meetings – in March, September and December in 2020 and in March, June and September in 2021. Minutes and records of attendance are published routinely and held in the Documents section of the Commission's [web page](#).

The Commission's initial [work plan](#) was agreed by the members and published on 11 July 2020. Smaller working groups were formed to lead the projects and also to 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 in March 2021 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 is currently considering the welfare issues arising for farmed fish, and wild animals when protecting farmed fish from predation (such as use of acoustic deterrents).

Beavers

The Beavers Working Group has paused its activity while a judicial review, considering the issuing of licences for killing beavers, is underway.

Deer Welfare

The working group was formed with the aim of providing a collective SAWC response to deer welfare issues arising from recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report of 2019. The Deer Working Group was established by the Scottish Government in 2017 to provide an independent review of existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for the management of wild deer in Scotland.

The working group published its response to the Deer Working Group Report on 3 February 2021.

Dog Training

The working group was established in March 2021 to review whether dog trainers and dog training methods should be regulated. This includes considering the use of electronic training collars.

Exotic Pets

The working group is considering animal welfare issues surrounding the keeping of exotic pets in Scotland and the potential need for further regulation. It has consulted a number of different sectors during its enquiries, including local authorities, APHA, Scottish SPCA, pet and trade industry stakeholders, Scottish/UK animal welfare NGOs, and EU stakeholders and officials.

Glue Traps

The working group was established to provide an opinion on the use and impact of these forms of wildlife management.

SAWC's report on the use of glue traps in Scotland was finalised and published on the SAWC webpage on 23 March 2021.

Sentience

The working group's main aim was to produce a statement on the definition of animal sentience, to use as a guide to SAWC's future activities. Notably, the definition also recognised sentience in cephalopods and decapod crustaceans.

SAWC's definition of animal sentience was finalised and published on the SAWC webpage on 10 February 2021.

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. We will publish a set of principles next year.' This work group was set up in order to review the principles and consider approving these if appropriate. One of the SAWC Members, Dr Pete Goddard, is also Chair of the Wild Animal Welfare Committee (WAWC). Dr Goddard provided an opportunity for more public exposure on ideas around wildlife welfare by means of a [WAWC Virtual Conference](#) which was held on 19 April 2021. An international panel of speakers were joined by over 300 members of the public, who signed up to attend.

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

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.

Abattoir provision and opportunities for mobile slaughterhouses

From a Scottish perspective to review the welfare issues around numbers of abattoirs, slaughter journey times and the welfare of animals killed in mobile slaughterhouses.

Scottish Wildcat reintroduction

Consider welfare aspects of microchipping domestic cats, compulsory neutering of cats and outdoor cat controls – opportunity for SAWC to review policy or provide an opinion on welfare issues at some point. Dr Andrew Kitchener to advise on current activities with SWC Action Plan Steering Group.

Performing animals and animal encounters (potentially including therapy animals)

Currently stakeholder engagement activities 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.

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.

Greyhound racing

Could be considered in future as GBGB regulation only covers licensed tracks, to address issues with unlicensed tracks, also whether regulation is effective in, for example, reducing fatalities at tracks.

Rewilding

Projects involving release of domestic or semi-domestic animals into a wild or partly wild setting raise various welfare concerns. SAWC would review these issues and provide best practice/policy advice.

Published Advice

[Response to Deer Working Group Report](#) – 3 February 2021

The Deer Working Group was established by Scottish Government in 2017 to provide an independent review of existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for the management of wild deer in Scotland. The Group prepared a detailed report on The Management of Wild Deer in Scotland, which was presented to the Scottish Government in December 2019.

SAWC reviewed the report from the perspective of deer welfare and prepared this response to highlight specific recommendations of importance for deer welfare, and to suggest future potential research requirements in this area.

[Statement on Animal Sentience](#) – 10 February 2021

SAWC released a statement which defined animal sentience as: *“the ability to have physical and emotional experiences, which matter to the animal, and which can be positive and negative.”*

[Report on the Use of Rodent Glue Traps in Scotland](#) – 23 March 2021

SAWC produced this report which considers the animal welfare issues surrounding the use of glue traps to control rodents in Scotland and makes recommendations regarding potential regulation.

[Letter to Cabinet Secretary on Ear Cropping](#) – 9 April 2021

SAWC members collectively decided to produce a “rapid response” to the emerging issue of an increasing number of ear-cropped dogs being seen in veterinary practices and in the wider community. The response was in the form of a letter sent to the former Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment.

Consultation responses

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission responded to three consultations.

- [Consultation on Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agricultural Research – November 2020](#)

SAWC's response to this consultation will be made available to the public in due course at <http://consult.gov.scot>

- [Consultation on the FAWC Opinion on the Welfare of Animals during Transport – December 2020](#)

SAWC's response to this consultation is now available to view at [this link](#).

- [Consultation on the Fur Market in Great Britain – June 2021](#)

SAWC's response to this DEFRA consultation will be made available to the public in due course at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fur-market-in-great-britain>.

Conclusions and Forward Look

During its first 12 months, under difficult circumstances, SAWC has established its ways of working, built relationships with other related bodies and been able to develop and publish key recommendations on a number of areas relating to wildlife welfare. It has also provided expertise in addressing specific welfare-related consultations, and provided information to the Scottish Ministers on important welfare issues. For a number of large and complex areas we have established expert working groups, and are gathering evidence to provide reports.

Many areas of welfare are complex and contested, there are rarely simple and black and white answers, and for many issues protecting the welfare of one species, may impact on the welfare of another. As SAWC undertakes consideration of these areas 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 Cats Protection
- 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 the National Museum of Scotland
- Professor Tim Parkin, Head of Bristol Veterinary School, formerly Professor of Veterinary Epidemiology at the University of Glasgow (SAWC member until February 2021)

Full biographies are available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-animal-welfare-commission-member-biographies/>.

Appendix II – Register of Interests

Name	Employer	Previous employers (last 5 years)	Research funder(s)	Consultancy (all unremunerated unless stated)	Other (all unremunerated unless stated)
Cathy Dwyer (chair)	Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) 0.6 FTE, seconded to Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (0.4 FTE)	n/a	Scottish Government; EU – DG-SANCO Open Philanthropy Project	Waitrose Good Life Partnership; Global Animal Partnership (honorarium)	Independent expert: EU Animal Welfare Platform; Scientific advisor, Dogs Trust; Member, British Horse Society; Member, International Society for Applied Ethology, British Society for Animal Science, Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour;
Mike Radford	University of Aberdeen	n/a	n/a	Involved in discussions and the provision of advice to a range of politicians, officials, public bodies, NGOs, and professional bodies on an ad hoc basis as required.	Member of governing council, Dogs Trust; Deputy Chair, Universities Federation for Animal Welfare; Deputy Chair, Humane Slaughter Association; Trustee, Association of Lawyers for Animal Welfare/UK Centre for Animal Law; Chair, ALAW Scottish Steering Committee; Member, Scottish SPCA;

					Member, Animal Welfare Science, Ethics, and Law Veterinary Association; Member, National Trust for Scotland; Registered supporter of RSPCA, CIWF, The Brooke All the official positions above are unremunerated.
Mike Flynn	Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA)	n/a	n/a	Involved in discussions with all other major UK organisations with regard to policy and legislation	Edinburgh Zoo welfare and ethics committee member. Charles Rivers Animal Welfare and Ethics committee, external member Links group member. Licensed Firearms holder (for emergency humane destruction only). BVA honorary associate RCVS honorary associate.
Marie Haskell	Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)	n/a	Scottish Government, InnovateUK (UKRI), Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board Dog's Trust Zoetis	None	International Committee for Animal Recording; Registered Supporter of Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cat Protection League, International Society for Applied Ethology

Andrew Kitchener	National Museums Scotland	n/a	BBSRC The Wellcome Trust AHRC National Science Foundation SeaWorld and Busch Gardens Conservation Fund	None.	Member Animal Welfare and Ethics Group, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland; Chair of People's Trust for Endangered Species; Council member and member of the Animal Welfare Committee of the Zoological Society of London; Member of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group and leader of the Cat Classification Task Force; Member of the IUCN Equid Specialist Group; Chair of the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan Steering Group; Member of the Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme Steering Group
Libby Anderson	Retired	n/a	n/a	Up to June 2020 held a consultancy position as Policy Advisor to OneKind animal welfare charity. Expect to continue to be involved in discussions and the provision of advice to a range of politicians, officials,	Secretary, Wild Animal Welfare Committee; Member, UK Centre for Animal Law Scottish Steering Committee; Member, Edinburgh Children's Panel. All voluntary positions.

				and NGOs on an ad hoc basis as required.	
James Yeates	Cats Protection	RSPCA	n/a	None	Member of AWC (Defra) Member of BVA and RCVS
Tim Parkin	University of Bristol	n/a	FEI, US Jockey Club, Grayson Jockey Club Research Foundation	British Horseracing Authority; American Quarter Horse Association (remunerated)	Member of: World Horse Welfare Veterinary Advisory Committee; PetPlan Charitable Trust Scientific Advisory Committee; FEI Veterinary Committee; FEI Endurance Technical Committee; British Horseracing Authority 'Horse Comes First' Advocate for racing.
Pete Goddard	Retired	n/a	n/a		Trustee and Chairman: Wild Animal Welfare Committee; Member: BVA; AWSELVA; Veterinary Deer Society
Paula Boyden	Dogs Trust	n/a	n/a	Defra Rabies Core Group; RSPCA Prosecutions Oversight Panel; Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group (remunerated)	Chair, the Links Group; Chair, Pet Advertising Advisory Group; Vice Chair, Canine and Feline Sector Group; Treasurer, Blue Dog Trust; Member, BVA, BSAVA, AWSELVA, SPVS, RCVS
Harvey Carruthers	Tay Valley Veterinary Centre	n/a	n/a	None	Member of BSAVA; Member of the Royal

					College of Veterinary Surgeons Trustee, Dog Aid Society of Scotland
Simon Girling	Royal Zoological Society of Scotland	n/a	AAZV Wild Animal Health Fund RSPB EU Life Fund	Veterinary Advisor to the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria (Hoofstock and Bird working group); Veterinary Advisor to the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) European Endangered Species Programmes for the Pallas' cat (<i>Otocolobus manul</i>) and Red fronted macaw (<i>Ara rubrogenys</i>); EAZA Veterinary Advisor for the Scottish wildcat; G&F Training and Consultancy Ltd (veterinary professional post-graduate training course provider-remunerated)	Chair, DEFRA's Zoo Experts Committee; Immediate Past-President and Executive Committee member of the European College of Zoological Medicine; Honorary Clinical Associate Professor, Glasgow University Veterinary School; Fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and of the Royal Society of Biology; Diplomate and full member of the European College of Zoological Medicine and European Board of Veterinary Specialists. Member of the: British Veterinary Zoological Society; European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians; American Association of Zoo Veterinarians;

					Association of Avian Veterinarians; Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians University of the Highlands and Islands (Visiting Professor)
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Appendix III – Contact Details

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

Secretariat Support for the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission
P-Spur
Saughton House
Edinburgh
EH11 3XD
Email: SAWC.Secretariat@gov.scot



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