

EAZA Position Statement on the Animal Health Strategy for the European Union



Introduction

This statement presents the position of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) on the Animal Health Strategy for the European Union (2007-2013) "Prevention is better than cure" and its resulting Action Plan. It is also endorsed by the European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (EAZWV) with approximately 680 individual members from zoos, zoo related research institutions and universities.

In general EAZA is pleased with the strategy and would like to congratulate the European Commission on its publication. The slogan "Prevention is better than cure" is much appreciated and reflects the approach of EAZA and its member institutions. The flexible approach to vaccination is a highly important aspect for the European zoo and aquarium community as is the link between animal welfare and animal health. A clearer and simplified regulatory framework is necessary, especially as EU animal health regulations are mostly directed at livestock and the impact of such legislation for zoo and aquarium animals is often unclear or open to multiple interpretations. The development of one general EU Animal Health Law is therefore strongly supported by EAZA.

The remainder of this statement will provide further detail on EAZA's position.

EAZA's current status and general position;

- As laid down in EAZA's constitution the objects of the association are: **a.** to promote co-operation for the furtherance of wildlife conservation, through internationally coordinated breeding programmes of wild animals and *in situ* conservation; **b.** to promote education, in particular environmental education; **c.** to promote scientific study; **d.** to represent the interests of its members;
- EAZA represents 324 members from 35 countries, 300 of which maintain public collections of animals. More than 280 institutions of the total EAZA membership are located within the European Union. EAZA member institutions receive approximately 140 million visitors a year and house more than 250,000 animals, excluding fish and invertebrates. EAZA member institutions employ 20,000 staff members, 5000 of which are seasonal;
- The 'EAZA Minimum Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria' include extensive paragraphs on animal welfare, health, hygiene, surveillance and veterinary aspects.

- EAZA members are often important economic drivers and cultural centres in their local communities;
- EAZA has a significant social role in educating European citizens about animals, their conservation, and overarching threat processes such as climate change. Zoos and aquaria have been demonstrated to host a far more representative visitor social spectrum than either museums or science centres;
- EAZA has adopted the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (2005) which articulates the modern role of zoos and aquaria and their commitment to conservation;
- EAZA institutions in the European Union comply with Council Directive 1999/22/EC relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos;
- EAZA encourages its member institutions to apply for approval under article 13 (2) of Council Directive 92/65/EEC;
- EAZA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (EAZWV) and supported the publication of the Transmissible Disease Handbook (2007). This is recognised as a key publication of high relevance across all sectors concerned with public health. EAZA will also be supporting the publication of the 2009 edition of this important document;
- All EAZA members must join the International Species Information System and use the Animal Record Keeping System (ARKS) software to keep up to date records of their animal collections;
- EAZA collections exchange approximately 25,000 animals annually;
- Emerging infectious disease outbreaks generally do not originate from zoo and aquarium collections. EAZA zoos have highly trained specialised veterinarians and therefore can quickly recognise newly arriving emerging infectious diseases, and thus can serve as emergent disease sentinels. Zoos and aquariums can suffer from outbreaks of diseases, through potential loss of stock, obstruction of transfers of animals between collections as part of vital conservation breeding programmes and loss of visitor revenue if the institution is within geographical areas of disease outbreak and human movement restrictions occur;
- Populations of endangered species kept in EAZA collections are often irreplaceable and some held in EAZA institutions are extinct in the wild.

We believe;

- Keeping and displaying healthy animals under good welfare conditions in EAZA collections is of crucial importance to reach EAZA's main objectives;
- Animal exchanges between EAZA member institutions (largely in the framework of EAZA's breeding programmes) are imperative to ensure healthy and sustainable populations of wild animals in human care into the future;
- EAZA's European Endangered species Programmes (EEPs) and European studbooks (ESBs) should be managed independently, where appropriate, from *ex situ* populations in other regions and from wild populations, unless specifically part of global endangered species programmes. Nevertheless, occasional imports of unrelated stock are important to ensure long-term genetic variability;

- The risk from infectious diseases in zoos and aquaria are significantly lower than in the agricultural industry, e.g. because of surveillance, housing conditions, reduced numbers of animals and individual care for most species;
- Compared to 4.3 million cattle, 21.7 million pigs and 794 million poultry traded between EU member states in 2006 the number of animals exchanged between EAZA members pose an extremely low health risk;
- Breeding programmes for endangered species are jeopardized by unclear legislation, lack of uniform implementation of EU legislation by member states and slow decision making processes making animal exchanges difficult or even impossible. This obstruction can lead to compromised welfare conditions and obstruction of conservation initiatives;
- EAZA's breeding programmes and the Animal Record Keeping System (in the process of being replaced by the Zoological Management Information System – ZIMS) are suitable means for identification and traceability of zoo and aquarium species.

What we would like to improve in the future;

- EAZA to be consulted at an early stage when the EU is formulating animal health and welfare legislation to ensure that wild animal species as held in zoos and aquaria are clearly and appropriately included in the regulatory definitions where relevant and excluded where irrelevant;
- The position of EAZA zoos and aquaria to be fully considered when designing EU animal health regulations;
- The health risks posed by animal collections of zoos and aquaria better evaluated in light of the existing EU animal health regulations;
- Exchanges of animals in the framework of recognised EAZA breeding programmes simplified and prioritised in relation to EU legislation pertaining to animal health;
- Implementation of the BALAI Directive 92/65 to be harmonized across EU Member States;
- EAZA breeding programmes and ISIS ARKS registration formally recognised as suitable means for identifying and tracing of zoo and aquarium animals;
- In relation to Council Regulation 1/2005 of 23 December 2004 animal transports between zoos carried out only by the institutions themselves should not be considered "commercial transports". In a future review of Council Regulation 1/2005 the wide diversity of species to be transported between zoos and aquaria and thereafter their differing and specific welfare needs should be recognised;;
- To continue to be able to vaccinate and facilitate off-label use of vaccines in zoo animals where appropriate both preventative and in the case of emerging disease outbreaks (refer to the '*EAZA Minimum Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria*') ;
- To have, through approval under 13(2) of Council Directive 92/65 and in accordance with CITES regulation, the possibility to import wild animals from third countries where there is an agreed and demonstrable programme need, particularly in relation to recognised and accountable EAZA conservation breeding programmes, and where the import can be demonstrated to not be of any detriment, either of welfare or persistence, to wild populations.