

# Briefing document

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## **EU Strategy for Animal Welfare** **(tail docking)**

### **Background**

In the EU, the welfare of pigs is assured by [Council Directive 2008/120/EC](#) published in 2009. The Directive applies to all categories of pig and lays down minimum standards for their protection: quality of the flooring surfaces, living space, requirements for light and maximum noise levels, permanent access to fresh water and to materials for rooting and playing, etc.

The EU has also established general rules concerning the protection of farmed animals, irrespective of the species. In 2011, the EU Commission further adopted an [EU Strategy for the protection and welfare of animals](#), laying the foundation for improving welfare standards from 2012 to 2015. The strategy provided for a two-pronged approach:

- **A proposal for a comprehensive Animal Welfare law**, including common requirements for competence of personnel handling animals.
- **A reinforcement of current actions**, such as increased efforts in training veterinary inspectors through the Better Training for Safer Food programme, while promoting EU value toward animals abroad.

### **EU recommendations to reduce pig tail docking**

Among the actions foreseen by the EU strategy on animal welfare which directly addressed the welfare of pigs was the publication of EU guidelines on the protection of pigs (focus on tail docking and enrichment material), initially planned for 2013.

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In March 2016, the Commission finally published [recommendations](#) laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs as regards measures to reduce the need for tail docking.

Directive 2008/120/EC provides that before carrying out tail docking other measures are to be taken to prevent tail biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities. The Directive also requires Member States to ensure that pigs have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mixture of such ('enrichment material'), which does not compromise the health of those animals.

National guidelines are already available in some Member States to help farmers promote the right living conditions for their pigs, but since husbandry systems differ across the Member States, the Commission's recommendations are accompanied by a [staff working document](#) which provides further details for a harmonised understanding on how the provision of manipulable material and avoidance of tail docking can be practically achieved.

Although these recommendations are not legally binding, this is the first time that such a document has been translated into all EU languages and EU Member States are encouraged to act upon it.

**Worth noting:**

In May 2014, EFSA published an [opinion on the use of animal and non-animal-based measures to assess the welfare of pigs](#). The opinion confirms the need for pigs to have manipulable materials to satisfy a range of behavioural needs and thus avoid adverse welfare consequences, one of these being an increased risk for tail biting in weaners and rearing pigs.

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## What's next?

A comprehensive animal welfare law is no longer on the EU political agenda, nor is a new strategy on animal welfare for the period 2016-2020. However, some activities planned under the 2012-2015 Strategy and not yet completed are expected:

- **In 2016**, an EU animal welfare stakeholders' dialogue should gain momentum, through the launch of specific projects, possibly on tail docking and slaughter. A study on the international aspects of animal welfare should also be released.
- **In 2017**, EU guidelines (best practices) on the protection of animals during transport should be published. EU guidelines (best practices) on the protection of animals at the time of killing are also expected.

### **Worth noting:**

A new [EU survey](#) from March 2016 shows that a majority of Europeans (94%) think it is important to protect the welfare of farmed animals, and 82% believe that it should be better protected than it currently is. Almost two-thirds of EU citizens (64%) want to receive more information about the conditions in which farmed animals are treated in their country. 59% also declare being ready to pay more for animal welfare friendly products. More specifically, 35% are prepared to pay up to 5% more and 16% are prepared to pay 6% to 10% more. Only 8% are willing to pay a top-up above 11%.

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