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POSITION PAPER ON IMPROVEMENT OF TRACEABILITY ON PET IDENTIFICATION IN VIEW OF REDUCING SANITARY RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH PETS STRAYING AND ILLEGAL MOVEMENTS OF ANIMALS

1. Present regulatory situation.

According to Directive 90/425CEE, Chapter 1 Article 3-c, live animals subject to trade within the european community must be identified in accordance with the requirements of the Community rules and, on the other hand, be registered in such a way that their origin can be traced.

National identification and registration systems had to be notified to the commission within three months. This regulation does not apply to pets, but it is a useful reference because it has established a very effective system for traceability.

Regulation 998/2003CE has established a european uniform system for identification of pets, primarily dogs, cats and ferrets.

Identification is mandatory to allow free circulation of pets within the European community.

After May 23, 2011, identification by microchips will be the only system accepted all over Europe.

The main purpose of identification and registration of live animals is to prevent spreading animal diseases into countries where they do not exist and contain breakouts where they occur. Concerning pets, specific provisions must be considered due to affective attachment of pet owners and the number of wandering dogs and cats. In critical sanitary situations, identification and easy traceability are needed to avoid a great number of preventive euthanasia.

Important side benefits, concerning pets, are to offer lost and found services and allow european pet owners to travel easily all over Europe.

The lost and found service has pushed many animal protection organizations to open registers in countries where public authorities have not taken initiative to establish a national register for pets. In several important countries, including the united Kingdom, Germany and Spain, there are several registers. Some are purely animal protection oriented, others are commercial.

For pets, several EU countries have not enforced the use of the country code within the identification number. This code is made of the three first digits according to the ISO country code.

They use microchips with manufacturer codes and no country code is common. This type of microchip is legal in many EU countries. It is preferred by many breeders because it facilitates trading animals with a false country of origin.

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2. Consequences

2.1. Tracing origin and owner of a pet is often difficult.

When a wandering pet is found, situations may occur where it is difficult or impossible to trace its origin and name of pet owner:

- the microchip number includes a country code, but there are several databases in that country (7 in Spain). Most shelters will not get in touch with all of them.
- the microchip number is a manufacturer one with no country code. The number of potential databases may be too large to call them anyway.

2.2. Illegal trade out of control

Microchips coded 9** (no country code) are available from manufactures for any distributor and subsequently from sub-distributors, with no obligation of traceability. This allows breeders to ship pets legally all over Europe to be sold with a false origin, after an early weaning, false sanitary documents and poor transportation conditions. When they reach the final destination, traceability is impossible.

3. Sanitary risks associated

In case of animal disease breakout, containment is needed, including mandatory vaccinations and restriction of pet wandering. Wandering pets will be seized and authorities need to identify their origin and get in touch with pet owners.

Tracing their origin may be impossible, particularly for pets identified without a country code, but also for pets identified in countries where several databases exist.

It is important to consider that many of the new EU members have endemic situations of rabies. There is a growing flow of circulation of citizens from those countries, traveling by car with their pets, crossing borders with little control. Those pets, potentially infected may escape during the trip.

Citizens from western countries, commonly travel to eastern Europe for buying a pet, because they are much cheaper than bought in western pet shops.

Pets also currently travel for exhibitions. They need only an identification, of any kind, and a passport for companion animals, which is not a secure document.

Identification by microchips without a country code which are distributed without traceability procedures offers a legal way to unethical breeding and pet trade. This includes poor sanitary situation in kennels, early weaning, poor transportation conditions, false sanitary certificates. Consequences are high risks of dissemination of diseases, dangerous dog behaviors and a clear contradiction with unanimously accepted principles of animal welfare.

4. How to trace pet origin all over Europe

Two systems presently exist:

- PETMAXX is an Internet portal allowing to reach a number of databases and browse from the microchip number to find the pet owner. It is limited to databases having granted access through Petmaxx. Many database refuse to join PETMAXX because they do not want to allow intrusion into their system. PETMAXX is supported by a microchip manufacturer in view of promoting the use of microchips. More information on: www.petmaxx.com
- EUROPETNET is also an internet portal providing access to a database of all microchip numbers registered by members of Europetnet. The members are organizations running pet databases. Members update their list of numbers twice a month. Anybody may enter into the EUROPETNET portal, browse from an identification number and get the name of the organization as well as procedure to get in touch with the pet owner. EUROPETNET is a very light organization, paid

primarily by its members, with no commercial connection, independent from manufacturers. It allows to accommodate member having different rules and restrictions for access to information on pet owners.

5. Recommendation

5.1. Include provisions into the future European Law on Animal Health for:

- Recognition of a European identification database as a necessary instrument to establish traceability of data associated to pet identification. This organization should run a database of all registered identification numbers and an Internet portal offering easy and unrestricted access allowing to know in which database a given identification number is registered and how to get associated data. It should be preferably a non-profit organisation / independent from manufacturers, and in no case would store individual data on pets or owners, but only reference of the local database where such information is available according to local rules.
- Obligation for microchip manufacturers, distributors or sub-distributors to keep microchip numbers, name and address of the person they sold and make it available on the Internet to the European database and to affiliated local databases through identification an password.
- obligation for veterinarians or other authorized person to register identifications within 10 days into a national or local database member of the European database.
- Mandatory transmission of all registered identification numbers from national or local databases to the european database with the organisation

5.2. Provide financial EU support for the European Identification database.