



ANIMAL PROTECTION DENMARK



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Eyes on Animals | Watching out for their welfare



24th February 2025

Olivér Várhelyi
Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare
European Commission

Please reply to:
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Dear Commissioner

Action by Commission needed to end the unlawful transport of unweaned calves from Ireland to France

In its audit report dated 22 December 2023 (DG(SANTE) 2022-7503) the Commission stressed that, in its view, the transport of unweaned calves from Ireland to France is being carried out in breach of Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport.

The Commission interprets the Regulation as requiring unweaned calves to be fed during the long sea crossing by roll-on roll-off (RORO) ferry from Ireland to France. However, the calves are not fed during the crossing; indeed it is not possible to feed unweaned calves while they are on a truck which is on board a RORO ferry. For unweaned calves, feed consists of cow's milk or milk replacer.

Paragraph 9 of the audit report states that the Irish competent authority's "instructions for official veterinarians do not require that official veterinarians verify that unweaned calves will be and are fed on the roll-on roll-off vessel. ***This is not in line with the Commission's interpretation of the legal requirements of feeding intervals laid down in Chapter V, Annex I to the Regulation***, in particular Point 1.4(a)". (emphasis added)

In paragraph 47 the audit report states: "the fact that calves are not given liquid feed on the roll-on roll-off vessel is contrary to the legal requirements of feeding intervals laid down in Chapter V, Annex I to the Regulation, in particular Point 1.4(a)."

Despite the Commission's audit report, Ireland continues to export large numbers of unweaned calves. Shortly after arrival in France, they are unloaded at a lairage near Cherbourg. After a 12-13 hour rest, they are reloaded and transported by road to other Member States including the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Romania, Poland, Hungary and Croatia. Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, states that 199,614 calves were exported in 2024.

In its Recommendations the audit report states:

"The [Irish] competent authorities are requested to provide, within 25 working days of receipt of the report, details of the actions taken and planned, including deadlines for their completion ("action plan"), aimed at addressing the recommendations set out below.

Recommendation 4. To ensure that unweaned calves are fed on roll-on roll-off vessels in compliance with the maximum feeding intervals, as required by Point 1.4(a) of Chapter V of Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005."

We would be grateful if you would let us know:

- **Whether the Irish competent authorities have provided an action plan to implement the above recommendation, and if so, what progress has been made to ensure compliance with the regulation.**
- **if Ireland has not provided an action plan, what steps the Commission is taking in respect of this failure to respect the Commission's request to provide an action plan.**
- **In the case of continued non-compliance, what steps the Commission is taking in respect of Ireland's failure to ensure that unweaned calves are exported in accordance with the feeding requirements of Regulation 1/2005.**

Given that unweaned calves continued to be transported from Ireland to France throughout 2024 without being fed during the RORO journey, we must assume that the Irish competent authorities have failed to submit an action plan to implement Recommendation 4. However, if Ireland has produced an action plan, we would be grateful if you could let us see a copy of it.

The Irish authorities may be using their attempt to develop an on-lorry feeding system for unweaned calves to justify their continued failure to respect the feeding requirements of Regulation 1/2005. To the best of our knowledge, no such on-lorry feeding system has been developed. Furthermore, it is highly doubtful that such a system could effectively provide milk replacer to the approximately 300 calves typically transported in a single livestock truck.

Previous letter to Commission and Commission response

On 25 July 2024, twenty two animal welfare organisations wrote to Commissioner Kyriakides urging her to take effective action to ensure that unweaned calves are not transported from Ireland to France by RORO ferry as it is not possible to feed the calves during the sea journey and accordingly these transports are in breach of Regulation 1/2005 as interpreted by the Commission.

Commissioner Kyriakides replied on 2 August 2024 (ARES(2024)5599582) saying that ‘the Commission is following up on the recommendations resulting from this audit with the Irish competent authorities and will continue to monitor the situation’. Despite this, Ireland has continued to export calves to France by RORO ferry; this suggests that Commissioner Kyriakides was unable to persuade Ireland to comply with Regulation 1/2005.

Request for Commission to take effective action to ensure compliance by Ireland with Regulation 1/2005

As calf exports from Ireland are being conducted in breach of Regulation 1/2005 as interpreted by the Commission, we urge you to take effective measures to halt this trade. We hope you will agree with us that it is unacceptable for animals to be regularly transported in breach of EU animal protection legislation and that when the Member State concerned declines to act, the Commission must take steps to ensure that the legislation is respected. Action by the Commission is needed urgently as Ireland’s calf exports are likely to resume at high levels in February/March 2025.

The provision in Regulation 1/2005 regarding feeding intervals for unweaned calves is not some minor or technical requirement. The Commission’s failure to enforce it has serious detrimental consequences for almost 200,000 calves a year. EFSA’s 2022 Scientific Opinion on the welfare of cattle during transport states that in order to prevent prolonged hunger intervals between milk meals for unweaned calves should not exceed 12 hours.

The length of time that unweaned calves go without feed on the journey from Ireland to France

Calves exported from Ireland may be on a truck for some 5-9 hours (in some cases longer) before the ferry to France leaves Ireland. This time includes loading onto the truck, the journey to the port, and waiting at the port before the truck is loaded onto the ferry. In some cases the trucks arrive at the port four hours before the ferry is due to sail. Moreover, it may be around three hours before loading onto the truck since the calves were last fed.

The ferry journey to Cherbourg takes 18 hours and a further at least 1.5 hours — in some cases longer — is needed to drive to the control post near Cherbourg, for unloading and before all the calves get feed. Indeed, investigations show that some calves have to wait a long time to be fed after arrival at the control post as feeding all the calves that have been carried on the ferry is a lengthy process.

In all, the calves usually go for 27 hours, or in some cases substantially more, without feed between the last feed before loading at the start of the journey and receiving feed at the control post near Cherbourg.

We once again urge the Commission to take action in respect of the breaches of Regulation 1/2005 that it identified in its audit report.

If the Commission fails to take effective and immediate steps to ensure compliance with Regulation 1/2005, we regret to inform you that we will have no choice but to escalate this matter to the European Ombudsman. The Commission's continued inaction in the face of clear legal breaches constitutes a case of maladministration, which we are prepared to formally report. Given the serious welfare implications for nearly 200,000 unweaned calves each year, the urgency of this matter cannot be overstated. We trust that the Commission will fulfill its duty to uphold EU animal protection legislation without delay.

Yours sincerely

Anima International: Kirsty Henderson President
Animal Justice Project: Claire Palmer MSc Zoology Director
Animal Law Italia: Alessandro Ricciuti CEO
Animal Protection Denmark: Britta Riis CEO
Animalia: Heidi Kivekäs Executive Director
Caring Vets: Nicole de Schwartz President
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) Åsa Hagelstedt Secretary General
Dyrevernalliansen: (Norwegian Animal Protection Alliance) Anton Krag CEO and Zoologist
Dzīvnieku Brīvība: (Animal Freedom Association) Katrīna Krīgere, CEO
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La Fondation Droit Animal, Éthique et Sciences: Louis Schweitzer President
LAV: Lorenza Bianchi Head of Food Transition
Loomus - Animal Advocacy Organisation: Anu Tensing, Board Member
Mi smo dio rješenja We Are Part of the Solution: Marijana Miljas Đuračić Director
Project 1882: Benny Andersson CEO
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SEY Animal Welfare Finland: Pihla Markkola Head Expert (Farm Animals)
The Swedish Association for the Protection of Animals: Lillemor Wodmar President
Una Terra Foundation: Ervin Nagy President
World Animal Protection: Roger Pettersson CEO World Animal Protection Sweden