

Working Together for Animal Welfare





Bó Cúailnge

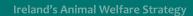


Foreword Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue T.D.

I am delighted to launch our Animal Welfare Strategy for Ireland 2021-2025. Responding to commitments in the Programme for Government, this ambitious new strategy builds on my Department's extensive dialogue with stakeholders and takes into account responses to a consultative document presented at the 2018 Animal Welfare conference'.

Animals have been central to Irish culture and heritage since ancient times and in modern Ireland, animal welfare is at the very heart of our relationship with both domesticated and wild species. Ireland's agricultural economy relies significantly on livestock production and many of us keep animals for leisure purposes or as domestic pets. When asked, Irish citizens say that animal welfare is increasingly important to them, and we are evermore aware of the interrelationship between the welfare of animals and human well-being. The importance of animal welfare is also reflected in the choices we make as consumers when buying animal-based products.

We are building on solid foundations with this strategy. My Department has a long history of supporting the welfare of animals, whether through advice or financial assistance to help farmers improve their facilities, or through ex gratia payments to our animal welfare charities; we are now taking policy to a new level. Animal welfare and its relationship with people's wellbeing is central to the 2020 Programme for Government, where we have made concrete, measurable commitments. My Department and the agencies within my responsibility will deliver on each of these promises, with meaningful input from stakeholders and citizens. For example, within the first quarter of 2021, I will bring forward legislation to phase out fur farming in Ireland. We will review the current ex gratia funding model for animal welfare charities and the underlying public policy objectives with a view to doubling the available funding in the context of a renewed policy and strategy. In 2021, my Department will start a consultation process with local authorities and other stakeholders to bring a cohesive national approach to the control of horses, with a view to bringing forward legislative proposals to update the Control of Horses Act.



In addition, we will review and seek to enhance our equine identification and traceability system to better support equine welfare.

My Department will continue to extend the badger vaccination programme nationwide. I have asked Teagasc, to mainstream animal welfare considerations across its teaching and advisory services for farmers and my Department will support excellent research and education through our research calls and by supporting the establishment of a Chair in Animal Welfare and Veterinary Ethics in University College Dublin.

I will establish an independently chaired Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare who will advise me on policy issues of relevance to the companion animal sector.

On the international stage, Ireland will continue to build on its excellent reputation as a country that actively promotes and safeguards the welfare of all animals.

This strategy will be underpinned by five guiding principles: working in partnership; science and evidence-led policy-making; improving education and knowledge; consistent evaluation and assessment, and an effective regulatory system.

Irish people care for and are committed to the welfare of their animals, none more than every sector of our farming community. I look forward to building on our strong foundations, developing deeper cooperation and partnerships with farmers, those whole own or care for animals in any capacity, as well as our professional, advisory and academic partners - we will deliver on this strategy together.

Charlie Molonalogue.

¹ https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/animalhealthwelfare/AnimalWelfareStrategy Consultation130918.pdf



Animal Welfare Strategy for Ireland 2021-2025

Ireland's heritage is closely associated with animals. From the familiar Celtic animal symbols in ancient Irish, to legends of the Táin Bó Cúailnge, our relationship with animals has evolved and livestock farming, companion animals, animal-based sports and leisure activities are all important aspects of modern Irish life.

Society's engagement with animal welfare has matured rapidly in recent decades, as reflected in the 2015 Eurobarometer survey², which confirms that a very high proportion of Irish citizens believe that animal welfare is important. This perspective relates to all animals, but especially in respect of those we keep for food production, leisure, sport or companionship.

Animals are sentient beings and society has a reasonable expectation that their welfare will be at the core of all animal-related activities and industries any failure to meet these expectations can undermine a sector's social licence to operate.

The agri-food sector makes a significant contribution to our economy, employing over 164,000 people countrywide in 2019, and accounting for 7.5% of Modified Gross National Income. Locally produced Irish food is exported to over 180 countries around the world, with agri-food exports worth €14.5 billion in 2019³. Consumer attitudes and preferences are evolving, and people are demanding greater assurances regarding animal welfare.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 brought all farmed and companion animals including leisure, sport and working animals under a single legislative framework, assigning over-arching responsibility for animal welfare policy to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).



To date, animal welfare policy has often developed in response to individual issues and events, introducing positive and significant animal welfare initiatives⁴. Building on these solid foundations and responding to submissions received during the 2018 public consultation⁵, this strategy has been developed to create a coherent, ambitious national approach to animal welfare.

- 2 http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/ DocumentKy/71348
- https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3ec3a-fact-sheet-on-irish-agriculture-september-2020/
- 4 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ca137-animal-welfare-initiatives/
- 5 A total of 24 submissions were received a summary of the responses is available on the Department website https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/animalwelfarestrategyconsultation/



What do we understand by Animal Welfare?

Animal Welfare is a complex and evolving concept and the term can mean different things to different people. Our perspectives on animal welfare are influenced by both 'values' and 'science'. This explains why there are often diverging views in society and indeed at times between scientists.

Our starting point in developing this strategy is that animals are sentient beings who can perceive their environment and experience sensations such as pain and suffering or pleasure and comfort, and can give expression to these sensations – sometimes in ways that are easy for people to perceive and understand, and at other times not.

There are a number of schools of thought on how best to describe and assess animal welfare. In the early days, animal welfare was viewed chiefly in terms of the animal's basic physical needs and its interaction with the physical environment. Veterinary professionals and other experts now acknowledge that in addition to their fundamental behavioural needs, animals' feelings are also important, while a third perspective is that animals' wellbeing is best assured if they can live according to their nature. A further view is that welfare must be seen from the animals' perspective – their own perception of their physiological and psychological state. In reality, all of these viewpoints are relevant and inter-linked.

This complexity in our understanding highlights how practical and ethical dilemmas can arise when assessing and working to meet an animal's welfare requirements. Much of the earlier research focussed on mitigating negative impacts, while more recently there has been an increasing emphasis on supporting positive welfare outcomes.



The Five Freedoms⁶ remain of critical importance in setting out basic requirements underpinning public policy and legislation. Our understanding is now enhanced by other more complex reflections on welfare such as the Five Domains⁷ and a Life Worth Living⁸. These provide valuable perspectives on how an animal is coping with its environment, both physically and psychologically.

We have learned that animal welfare should be viewed in a broad context, just as the 'One Health' concept recognises that human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of the ecosystems in which they exist. Our animals' health, the environments they inhabit, how they adapt to those environments, and the degree of social interaction they experience, have profound effects on their welfare; and more broadly, also impact on society beyond the animals themselves. These important changes in our understanding are captured by the 'One Welfare' concept, which builds on the 'One Health' concept, and further develops the idea that the inter-relationships and inter-connectedness between human, animal and environmental health should be expanded to recognise that human wellbeing and animal welfare are also inter-connected and inter-related.

⁶ https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110909181150/http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm

⁷ https://org.uib.no/dyreavd/harm-benefit/Concepts%20of%20animal%20well-being%20and%20predicting.pdf

⁸ https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110909181140/http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports.htm

⁹ https://www.oie.int/for-the-media/onehealth



Whilst best understood in relation to the well-recognised benefits associated with 'assistance animals', 'One Welfare' goes beyond this, encompassing everyday interactions and synergies between people and animals in all settings, including on farms.

Societal values and science are important contributors to our understanding of what good animal welfare means. As our knowledge and understanding increases, so too does our responsibility to ensure that we care for our animals in ways that ensure their best possible welfare and quality of life.









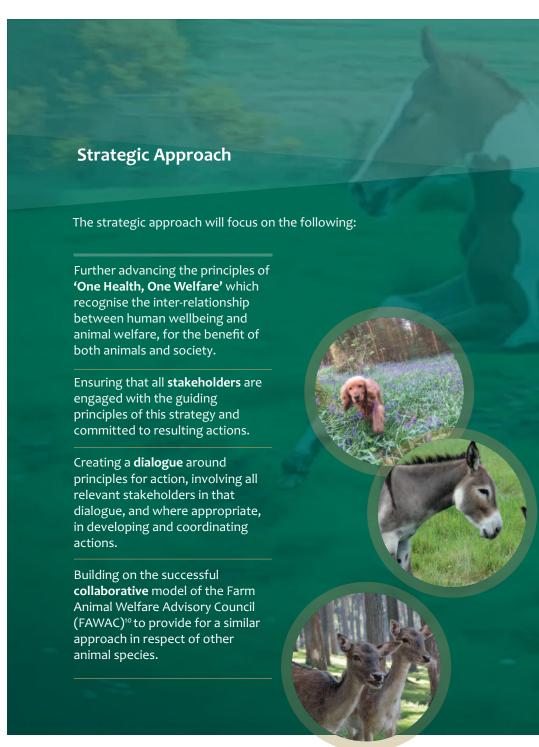
Strategic Approach

The strategy sets out **five broad, cohesive principles** that will facilitate respectful dialogue, enhance cooperation, increase capacity, improve coordination and thus improve animal welfare in a wide variety of situations.

It will create a high-level framework for engagement between government and stakeholders, enabling a process for considered deliberation on animal welfare in Ireland. The engagement process will be inclusive, enabling stakeholders with varying views and interests to have their voices heard.

This strategic approach will contribute to a better understanding of animal welfare in an Irish context. It will support policy formation and the development of action plans for improvements. The strategy will encourage compliance, enhance research efforts and contribute to better regulation and enforcement.

To drive the delivery of this strategy, DAFM will establish a **new, dedicated Animal Welfare Division.** With a blend of veterinary, social science and administrative expertise, the Division will work in partnership with national and international stakeholders, ensuring that Ireland is an international 'One Health, One Welfare' leader.



Ireland's Animal Welfare Strategy

Building synergies to improve welfare, whether through positive reinforcement, for example by marketing and labelling of food products with high animal welfare provenance, or through regulation and enforcement.

Further advancing the **evidence** base to support the development and implementation of policies on animal welfare.

Further development of a comprehensive, holistic capacity for objective monitoring and assessment of animal welfare.

Broadening the dissemination of **knowledge** concerning animal welfare through education and other means of knowledge transfer.

Agreeing on **priorities** to be advanced within the time frame of the strategy.

Setting **SMART targets**¹¹ for advancing the strategy and clearly reporting against these targets.

Ensuring **cohesion** between the strategic principles and activities currently under way.



¹⁰ www.fawac.ie

¹¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound







Working in Partnership

Working in partnership provides mechanisms through which the views and contributions of stakeholders are shared and taken into consideration in the development of policies, in the evolution and development of standards, guidelines and codes of practice, and in the formation of legislation. It enables stakeholders with different perspectives to participate in respectful dialogue, recognising the complexity of the concept of animal welfare, the legitimacy of others to have different views and that their own particular view may not prevail. The partnership principle requires that all stakeholders recognise and take responsibility for fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities.

Several fora based on this principle are already working successfully in the area of animal welfare in Ireland. The FAWAC, the Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group (IPAAG)¹² and the National Greyhound Consultative Forum all play important roles in bringing relevant stakeholders together to discuss, share views and seek agreement on common approaches to welfare related issues. The veterinary profession - practitioners, public service veterinarians and academics all have vital roles to play in advancing knowledge, demonstrating leadership and promoting best practice.



To enhance this process of engagement and partnership, the FAWAC approach will be used as a model to establish a **new, independently chaired Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare** to examine and advise the Minister on issues of relevance to the companion animal sector. Within two years, we **will review the current ex-gratia funding model** for animal welfare organisations and the underlying public policy objectives with a view to doubling the available funding in the context of a renewed policy and strategy.

DAFM will also establish and support a **stakeholder consultation** to explore the development of high-welfare outdoor-reared pig and poultry sectors.

In the context of 'One Health, One Welfare', we will encourage and enable inter-disciplinary engagement among colleagues at national level, including social scientists, human health professionals, veterinarians, agricultural scientists and others to optimise this human/animal interface for the benefit of animals, people and society.

Reflecting societal concerns about the keeping, breeding and trading of exotic animal species, DAFM will take the lead in establishing an independently chaired inter-departmental group to ensure a coherent national approach to policy and regulation related to **exotic animals**.



DAFM will ensure that 'One Health, One Welfare' objectives are central to Ireland's approach to the new Common Agricultural Policy, and under the Rural Development Programme¹³, will introduce measures to support industry such that it meets its obligation of reducing the incidence of tail docking in pig production. Ireland will also continue to collaborate closely with other EU Member States, the European Commission and the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health), with a view to improving animal welfare standards within Europe and worldwide. Irish experts are already participating with the OIE and others in international projects relating to the welfare of animals, focusing particularly on the areas of transport and slaughter.

DAFM will also ensure that while supporting Irish industry to secure and enable agri-food markets, animal welfare will be at the forefront of policy development and implementation, and this will be achieved through collaboration with stakeholders such as the Calf Stakeholder Forum, and with government agencies such as Bord Bia and Teagasc.

¹³ Animal welfare is among the main priorities of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and will be advanced, with the support of national co-funding, as part of the 2020-2027 Rural Development Programme.



Science and evidence-led policy making

In acknowledging the varying and deeply held perspectives on animal welfare, an evidence-based approach to public policy development is necessary. Evidence-based policy is rooted in and informed by high quality, robust science. The 'One Health, One Welfare' embodies the interrelationship and interdependency between humans and animals, and further research is needed to better understand these complex dynamics, where positive interactions yield positive outcomes for people and animals, while breakdown of the relationship potentially has negative effects for both.

Our understanding of animals' responses to stimulus has increased greatly over the years and continues to evolve; sustained support to research in this area will support better policy making. The independently chaired **Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare** (SACAHW) provides scientific advice to the Minister on animal health and animal welfare matters. This committee will continue to play an important role in:

- Identifying priority areas where gaps exist and greater knowledge is needed to provide a sound scientific basis for policy, and
- Interpreting the outcomes of research and providing scientific advice to inform policy making.



DAFM's Research Programme provides public funding, on a competitive basis, for research projects across the agri-food sector. DAFM will encourage and prioritise excellent projects focusing on One Health, One Welfare topics such as dairy-beef integration. DAFM is also committed to encouraging and supporting Irish researchers in competing for EU or international research funding.

The European Green Deal¹⁴ and Farm to Fork Strategy¹⁵ highlight that animal welfare is a central consideration in overall EU policy development, with a particular emphasis on transport and slaughter. Ireland will once again support animal welfare measures as part of a socially sustainable farming sector in the national plan for the next Common Agricultural Policy cycle (2020 – 2027).

This strategy also recognises and acknowledges the value of scientific advice generated in the broader European context, including studies by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)¹⁶, and the EU Reference Centres for Animal Welfare¹⁷. Ireland is represented at the EU Platform on Animal Welfare which promotes dialogue on animal welfare issues among competent authorities, businesses, civil society and scientists.¹⁸

In response to the Programme for Government 2020, DAFM will bring forward legislation to phase out fur farming in Ireland.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal en#documents

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork en

¹⁶ https://www.efsa.europa.eu/

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/eu-ref-centre_en

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/eu-platform-animal-welfare en



In addition, as part of this commitment to an evidence-led approach to policy formation, DAFM will provide funding towards the establishment of a **Chair in Animal Welfare and Veterinary Ethics at the School of Veterinary Medicine in University College Dublin (UCD)**. This appointment will enhance academic expertise and scientific leadership, while furthering primary and continuing education for veterinary professionals, promoting research and contributing to policy developments, and supporting UCD's key role in the newly established EU Reference Centre for Ruminant and Equine Welfare.

DAFM's Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) supports farmers by providing grants for new/improved buildings and equipment. This programme focuses on helping farmers to improve animal welfare and production conditions and will be available to pig and poultry farmers in particular.

On the basis of the best available veterinary and scientific advice, DAFM will continue to extend the badger vaccination programme nationwide.





Improving education and knowledge

Education in this instance is to be understood in its broadest sense. It encompasses education in formal and academic settings as well as providing knowledge and training relating to animal care and animal welfare in less formal ways to a wide range of animal keepers, carers and others involved with animals.

Education is an important step in ensuring better animal welfare outcomes. There are many kinds of animals, many different circumstances in which they are kept, and a multitude of owners/keepers who have different levels of knowledge of animal husbandry.

Good animal welfare can be best assured where people understand an animal's physical, behavioural and nutritional needs and can recognise when an animal is healthy and when not. Different skills are needed to deal with different species, breeds and different stages in an animal's life, especially when caring for young animals. People involved in breeding and rearing animals need specific skills and knowledge. Those with good husbandry skills and knowledge are better equipped to plan for and deal with adverse events. Acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills becomes even more important as an owner or keeper has increasing numbers of animals under his or her control, takes on responsibility for a new species, or embarks on a new production system.

It is critical that animal owners and keepers understand and acknowledge that they bear primary responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the animals under their control and equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills.

All others have a responsibility to ensure that they meet ethical and legislative obligations regarding the welfare of animals in the context within which they operate. These include those involved in:

- Trade of animals.
- Transport of animals.
- Animal breeding.
- Care and treatment of animals in ill health or distress.
- Provision of routine animal or herd health services.
- Provision of animal husbandry advice and support services.
- The provision of advice on nutrition.
- The manufacture of animal feed.
- Slaughter and killing of animals.
- Rescue and sheltering of animals.
- The organisation of competitions involving animals.
- Organising events where animals are on show or performing.
- The design of animal housing and handling facilities.

- Provision of feeding and/or production systems.
- The introduction and promotion of new approaches to animal husbandry, control, handling, nutrition and production systems.
- The introduction and promotion of new breeding practices or breeding indices.
- The identification of new market opportunities where requirements may impact on the welfare of animals.
- The use of animals for scientific research or education.
- Wildlife management.
- Hunting and pest control activities.
- Policy development across all animal-based sectors.



Each person has a responsibility to ensure that any intervention they make or propose – through direct contact with an animal, or indirectly through advice they give, facilities they provide or systems they devise - does not impact negatively on the welfare of any animal. With their professional expertise and commitment to continuing education, veterinary practitioners and veterinary nurses have important leadership roles in leading by example and promoting evidence-based animal welfare education and awareness in the course of their work.

Sectoral Codes of Practice to promote and advise on best practice are an effective way to advance animal welfare standards. There will be further developments in this area within the time frame of this strategy, and in collaboration with Teagasc and the Agricultural Consultants Association (ACA).

Teagasc, Ireland's Agricultural Training and Advisory body, provides well-developed courses and training opportunities for the farming community with a strong emphasis on animal husbandry. Teagasc courses will continue to evolve, ensuring that clear consistent animal welfare considerations are mainstreamed across all its teaching and advisory services for farmers.

Particular emphasis will be placed on evaluating the potential for alternative husbandry practices such as outdoor pig and poultry initiatives and dairy calf at foot rearing. New knowledge about dairy-beef integration will be disseminated by Teagasc and other advisory services, and any new systems or interventions that are introduced or promoted will be evaluated in advance from a welfare perspective.

The new Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare will be asked to advise on the most appropriate content and ways of educating companion animal owners about caring for their animals and the feasibility of extending animal welfare awareness into the broader educational system will be considered through inter-departmental and broader stakeholder discussions.

Consistent approach to evaluation and assessment

Animal welfare is complex, multi-faceted, and there are often different and sometimes opposing perspectives, therefore a robust, consistent approach to evaluation and assessment is essential. Furthermore, a strong approach to evaluation and assessment assists in monitoring progress, in identifying needs for intervention, and in measuring the impact of newly introduced measures on animal welfare outcomes.

When assessing an animal's welfare state, we need to be aware of the challenges and limitations of individual methods. As animal welfare represents what an animal is experiencing, the best available assessments use a combination of animal-based indicators and resource-based measures. This blended approach is needed to ensure that the evaluation is as holistic as possible, considering the different parameters of physical, mental and the 'living environment'.







Our overall focus is to ensure the best animal welfare outcomes for animals in all our husbandry systems – extensive or intensive - and in all locations where animals are kept.

DAFM will work with practitioners, academic experts and other stakeholders to further develop these animal-based indicators in various sectors, for example by capturing information on docked tails at ante-mortem inspection of pigs and foot pad dermatitis lesions on post mortem inspection of poultry.

DAFM will work with Local Authorities and other stakeholders to bring a cohesive **national approach to the control of horses** and will review and seek to enhance the national equine identification and traceability system to better support equine welfare. Additionally Rásaíocht Con Éireann will introduce a new, strengthened system of greyhound **traceability**.

DAFM will also further enhance the monitoring of welfare standards for all live animals for export.

Effective Regulation

Building on current, solid foundations, our ambition is to have a robust and fair regulatory and enforcement system which is also sensitive to the principles of 'One Health, One Welfare'.

Better Regulation flows from evidence-based policy making and engagement with citizens and stakeholders through a 'working in partnership' model. This approach to regulation envisages consultation with citizens in advance to better understand societal needs and concerns and suggestions for action. This will feed into the policy-making process, and help ensure that policy directions and regulations are coherent and well understood by all.

At times, enforcement actions are necessary to protect the welfare of animals where individual owners/keepers are non-compliant. In the context of Better Regulation, enforcement actions must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive – ensuring that the matter of concern is effectively resolved, reflecting the extent or degree of non-compliance and signalling to the individuals concerned and to society that certain behaviours are unacceptable and will lead to sanctions.

Instances also arise where the poor health or wellbeing of an owner or keeper may lead to the welfare of animals under their control being compromised. Effective welfare outcomes for the animals may require the holistic engagement of various animal and human health/wellbeing services. The use of a 'One Health, One Welfare' approach can help in resolving certain situations, and will be encouraged.

The Early Warning System (EWS) established under the auspices of the FAWAC has played an important role in identifying and dealing with several such incidents over the years. DAFM will further develop this initiative and seek to include a broader range of support partners.



Conclusions

This strategy sets out broad principles as to how we will improve animal welfare in Ireland over the coming years. It describes a framework for engagement and collaboration that will direct future activities and further enhance animal welfare matters in Ireland - benefitting both animals and Irish society. Following engagement and consultation through the partnership model, further specific objectives will be identified. An detailed action plan with specific, measurable indicators will be developed, and DAFM will set up a High-Level Monitoring Group which will meet biannually to monitor and report on progress.

New initiatives are planned to better inform and coordinate the national approach to animal welfare. These will include the continuation of the FAWAC and the SACAHW, and the establishment of a new Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare. There will be a new partnership between DAFM and the School of Veterinary Medicine in UCD to contribute to scientific leadership at a national level, an increased focus on animal welfare education at all levels and an enhanced DAFM Animal Welfare Division to lead on the delivery of this strategy.



Animal Welfare in Ireland - what's new?

Actions under this Strategy include commitment to:

- Introduce legislative prohibition on fur farming
- Establish a new, independently chaired Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare
- Review the ex-gratia model and underlying policy objectives, doubling funding available to support these objectives
- Reduce the prevalence of taildocking in pigs
- Support the development of highwelfare outdoor pig and poultry production systems
- Establish a DAFM-led interdepartmental group on exotic animals to advise on policy and regulation
- Support the establishment of the first Chair in Animal Welfare & Veterinary Ethics at UCD School of Veterinary Medicine

- Mainstream the One Health, One Welfare approach in all relevant research projects and training/knowledge transfer programmes funded by DAFM and Teagasc
- Mainstream animal welfare across all Teagasc education, knowledge transfer and training activities
- Develop new animal-based indicators to assess animal welfare standards - for example capturing information on docked pig tails at ante-mortem inspection
- Develop a national coordinated approach to control of horses involving relevant stakeholders, and including the review of identification and traceability systems
- Introduce a new system to improve greyhound traceability led by Rásaíocht Con Éireann
- Further enhance the monitoring of welfare standards for all live animals exported

The Strategy will be implemented through a detailed action plan, led by DAFM

