

Introduction

This website is intended as a judicious, authoritative and reliable education and information tool that is of interest both to Law professionals and laypeople.

The most important novelty –one which distinguishes us from other websites about animals- is that we offer the first juridical database on animals. This innovative project –the only one of its kind in Spain- has been made possible thanks to the collaboration of the Affinity Foundation, which with generosity and intelligence, personified in its President, Maria Azkargorta, has offered us the help, support and impetus we needed to collect and organise as a flexible tool all of the national, regional, European and international legislation and jurisprudence on animals. We have gathered more than 800 rules/regulations and all of the sentences (as yet not very numerous) on animal welfare.

This Web Centre is devoted to offering service in two areas: science and education:

In the scientific domain the Web Centre is supported by an external “Advisory Committee” composed of eminent specialists, it includes original sections such as the commentary on sentences concerning animals –to bring to our readers the progress in Jurisprudence on animal protection-; constantly updated legislation and sentences regarding animals; articles and contributions on animal perspectives written, or authorised, by the authors for publication on this website; and boast an excellent cadre of contributors who will keep this website alive and updated.

The educational aspect is born of our efforts towards having the interests of animals fully regarded in the juridical system, to ensure that future generations of jurists have the best training in this field and to make society sensitive to the reality that animals are our partners in the journey of life, beings that feel and that deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

The EU has, since its beginnings, encouraged the improvement of Animal Welfare from a broad perspective, keeping in mind first the interests of the animals together with the protection of food safety and public health. The approach, which we adhere to also at the Web Centre, is therefore multidisciplinary, with a view to improve the quality of life of the animals and the relations in human communities.

The study of animal welfare and the prevention of their mistreatment can bring together people of diverse backgrounds, such as Law students, juridical operators, livestock professionals, veterinarians, members of animal welfare associations, experts in nutrition, public health, mental health and support to victims of domestic violence, education, criminology, sociology, and the public administration. In short, anyone who’s input in the currents of opinion and in social life can contribute to uproot abusive behaviour towards animals that is incompatible with civilised society.

Animal welfare has become, in recent years, one of the priorities of Europeans [1]. From an attitude favouring the protection of animals from mistreatment, we have moved energetically toward their consideration as sentient beings and their inclusion within the compass of sustainable development.

The prevention of mistreatment of animals has historically (as far back as from Darwin’s times) enjoyed special attention in the Anglo-American and Germanic spheres, related both to the scientific recognition

of the capacity of animals to suffer and feel stress [2] –meriting, therefore, legal protection-, and to the consideration that mistreatment of animals can be an indicator of a propensity toward interpersonal violence.

Only three European constitutional charters (those of Switzerland, Germany and Austria) include animal welfare –the consideration that animals are part of the common heritage that the State must protect and preserve- in their legal systems, which reflect the values of a society. Other European countries have for years been enacting norms regarding the subject matter which is the focus of our attention. Through this website we wish to make available a body of information on the state of the legislation regarding animals that is as exhaustive as possible. Today our knowledge cannot remain limited to our immediate surroundings. Improving the lives of animals is a global endeavour.

The religious division between catholic and protestant countries (usually identified with Southern and Central-Northern European countries, respectively), also reveals a split between both traditions regarding the level of sensitiveness to animal welfare. The EU itself, born as an economic union, recognised in the articles of its Constitution, and today in the Treaty of Lisbon, the status of animals as beings that are part of our natural environment. The European directives on animal welfare, however, are tendentially applied by the Ministries of Agriculture, where animals are commonly regarded as “products”.

Perceptible changes in society, in the EU directives, in the sentences of some courts, as well as in the constitutions of some countries stem from the recognition that animals are sentient beings [3].

We are devoted to make this fact better known, and to work with enthusiasm towards a legal horizon that is in harmony with the true nature of animals. In other words, we speak of Animals with Rights. It isn't an easy task. We must unite the efforts of many people, and this Web Centre was created for just that. We will appreciate all the suggestions we may receive.[3]

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(1) Eurobarómetro 2006. G. Bolliger, Europäisches Tierschutzrechts: Tierschutzbestimmungen des Europ Rats und der europäischen Union (mit einer ergänzenden Darstellung des schweizerschen Rechts), (Bern 2000).

(2) Moberg and Mench, The Biology of Animal Stress (Basic Principles and Implications for Animal Welfare (NY 2000).

(3) L. Carbone, What Animals Want?: Expertise and Advocacy in Laboratory Animal Welfare Policy (NY 2004).