



Fachkonferenz

“Time to Act – Identification and Registration of Dogs and Cats in Germany and Developments in the EU”

A Conference Report

At the I&R Network’s conference on 6 November 2019, experts discussed the advantages and obstacles of nationwide mandatory Identification and Registration of companion animals in Germany with more than 100 participants. The event, held in the Representation of the Saarland to the Federal Republic in Berlin, enabled a wide-ranging exchange of views on the problems and solutions. The group of participants consisted of all the stakeholders involved in the issue – from the transponder industry and the private and public registries in Germany and abroad to representatives of various professional groups from the veterinary profession, breeders, the pharmaceutical industry, administrative officials, political decision makers from the parliaments at the federal and the state (Länder) level, animal welfare organisations and the animal welfare representatives of the states. The responsible ministry – the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture – to which the request was primarily addressed, was the only stakeholder to turn down the invitation to the event and the panel discussion that took place in this context.

Despite this, the participants took the opportunity to exchange views on the issues and concluded that there is no argument against the need for nationwide obligatory I&R for dogs and cats. Indeed, it brings many benefits. The Network has developed a practical, down-to-earth and above all virtually cost-free solution for implementation in Germany, which it presented at the conference.

The conference

The welcome speeches reflected the theme of the day. The speech of the Minister for the Environment and Consumer Protection of the Saarland, Reinhold Jost, was delivered by the SPD Member of Parliament Pia Döring. Greetings from the animal protection entrepreneur, foundation president and generous supporter of the conference, Pier Giovanni Capellino from the feed manufacturer Almo Nature and the non-profit Fondazione Capellino were delivered by Peggy Pleines, who explained why the foundation supports the mission of the I&R Network out of conviction. In his speech, Dr Hans-Friedrich Willimzik, Animal Welfare Officer of the Saarland and head of the conference organiser, I&R Network, once again called on the German Federal Government to act in the light of the arguments offered by experts in all areas concerned.

The keynote speaker, Petras Auštrevičius, Member of the European Parliament and Vice President of the Animal and Species Protection Interest Group, reminded the conference, among other things, that the European project is based on a deeply humanistic idea. One of the consequences of this is Article 13 of the Treaty of Lisbon (TFEU). The recognition that animals are sentient beings also applies to companion animals. The ability to trace them to their keeper is part of the principle of “Responsible Ownership”. Furthermore, there must be consistent standards for transponders in order to make them tamper-proof and to prevent the criminal trade in puppies. The task of the EU Commission is to harmonise the very different I&R regulations in the Member States. This is urgently needed and is possible on the basis of the EU Animal Health Law. The European Parliament will continue to press for this and will again bring in an EU Resolution on this issue in this new parliamentary term.

In the first segment of topics that followed, speakers who are active at the EU level in relevant bodies and working groups addressed the conference. These included Andrew Robinson, who until recently served as Vice

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President of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE). He provided an overview of the UK scheme and the status of the voluntary working group on the dog trade, which calls for obligatory I&R. Iwona Mertin of the Eurogroup for Animals subsequently took up this thread, pointing to the EU Animal Health Law as the basis for the EU Commission's duty to act. Both referred to the "Dog Trade" working group in connection with the animal welfare platform being set up by the EU Commission. The focus here is on the issue of cross-border trade, and consequently there are calls for an expansion of the TRACES database, as well as new registers for "operators" and "establishments" and networking of the databases. The current growth of the increasingly professional illegal puppy trade, which can clearly be categorised as organised crime, was the subject explored by Sarah Ross, companion animals expert at FOUR PAWS International.

In the second segment, transponder expert Dr Sven Hüther presented the technical side of identification. In principle, all transponders used throughout the EU – not only those intended for animals for cross-border transport – should comply with the ISO standard. He pointed out solutions to the problems and legal gaps that currently exist in the production, distribution and application of transponders. These can be easily solved by means of a corresponding legal requirement. All these improvements are necessary to achieve a secure EU-wide system with transponder identification that is unique, lifelong, tamper-proof, can be read across the EU and includes companion animals.

An overview of the solutions from other countries

The participants were then given an opportunity to compare how dogs and cats are identified and registered in other EU Member States. Tsang Tsay Chow (Belgium), Remi Gelle (France), Finbarr Heslin (Ireland) and Valdeko Paavel (Estonia) presented their registries and described measures that will lead to positive results in this context and what would be important for a future EU target. Innovations were also included in the conference agenda. For example, Gudbrand Vatn of the Norwegian registry DyreID is convinced that the electronic pet passport could solve many problems. The president of the European organisation Europetnet, Michel Schoffeniels, together with Julia Mundl of FOUR PAWS International, presented an option for action that could directly exclude criminal traders from online platforms before they can offer their animals for sale, provided that the EU Commission adopts appropriate regulations.

This was followed by a look at Germany. Dr Marco König, State Animal Welfare Officer of Saxony-Anhalt, gave a rundown of the 16 very different regulations of the federal states. Afterwards, Dr Petra Sindern, a practising veterinarian and Vice President of the Association of Veterinary Practitioners (bpt), explained the specific infection risks that illegally imported animals present to animals and humans. For the German Kennel Club (VDH), Prof. Dr Heinrich Meßler spoke about the problems faced by reputable breeders, who spend a lot of time, expertise and expense on their animals and struggle to compete against the unscrupulous traders in the market. The fact that there are serious animal welfare problems associated not only with the puppies but also with the illegal puppy "production sites" was proved by graduate biologist Torsten Schmidt of the Federation against Abuse of Animals, together with Dr Jörg Styrie, the Managing Director of the Federal Association for Animal Welfare, by specifically identifying animal suffering based on the puppy-trade supply chain.

Highly anticipated: presentation of the solution

The comprehensive overview of the current situation outlined above was followed by the eagerly awaited presentation of the solution developed by the I&R Network. Philip McCreight, Managing Director of the registry for companion animals TASSO e.V., presented the so-called Alliance of Registries with a central access point for all registries and registry types in Germany. He demonstrated the principle of this enquiry service (HABS for short) and mapped out the possibilities that this technical solution offered. This system could be used to bundle together all registries and their various functions. Private users – for example veterinarians or animal shelters – would no longer have to consult several registries, but would immediately be informed whether an animal is registered and, if so, in which registry. In accordance with the pre-examined information provided by

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authorities that must demonstrate their legitimate interest, this service will also facilitate and simplify their investigative work. Local authorities would save costs involved in housing lost animals, as rehoming them would be quicker and easier. The federal states would save considerable investment and operating costs associated with their own state registries, which can only offer registration functions, but not the lost-and-found functions. The innovations mentioned during the day – including further registries of breeders, dealers etc. and a systematic “online ads check” by Europetnet – could also be integrated into this structure.

At the end of the day, there is a broad consensus

The conference ended with a panel discussion moderated by freelance journalist and former ARD Capital correspondent Norbert Carius. Here, briefly reflecting on what the conference had heard through the day, the participants concluded that the benefits of a mandatory I&R of dogs and cats were evident. There is an urgent need to act in Germany: all the facts and a workable solution are on the table! This appeal went out to the Länder for support and to the Federal Government and the EU for action. In addition, the experts are convinced that Germany must also prepare for an EU-wide approach. Under the German presidency in the second half of 2020, Germany could actively take the issue further forward. This showed once again how important the participation of a representative of the responsible Federal Ministry would have been in discussing possible counterarguments to introducing mandatory I&R.

Petras Auštrevičius assured the conference that the European Parliament will continue to demand EU-wide Identification and Registration. Similarly, representatives from the veterinary profession and animal welfare sector will not let up: they will continue to strive for comprehensive EU-wide mandatory I&R for dogs and cats, whether in the form of harmonisation at the Member State level, for which the I&R Network offers the solution, or through a central approach by means of legislation under the EU Animal Health Law.

The conference was led by the animal welfare officers of the German states as well as other members of the I&R Network, so the day was organised by a knowledgeable group of people.

The conference brought together representatives from sectors that had not previously had an opportunity to meet and exchange views on this topic. The organisers are convinced that this was a successful first meeting, sending a clear message to the politicians to take action and demonstrating just as clearly that the I&R Network’s task is now to continue down the path with concrete steps.

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