Country Update on Animal Welfare (Philippines)

A. Legislative Developments

Animal welfare becomes relevant in the global discourse. The welfare of the animals is both an economic and social concern especially in international trade requirements and with the increasing public criticism on the need to improve the animal welfare practices in the country. Considered to be living and sentient, animals deserve special attention hence, the Animal Welfare Act of 1998 or Republic Act 8485 and then certain sections of the said law were amended in 2013 through Republic Act 10631.

The enactment of The Animal Welfare Act of 1998, evidently recognizes the importance of animal welfare in the country. It is the aim of the Act “to protect and promote the welfare of animals in the Philippines by supervising and regulating the establishment and operation of all facilities utilized for breeding, maintaining, keeping, treating or training of all animals either as objects of trade or as household pets”. In 2013, the R.A. 10631, “An Act amending certain sections of Republic Act No. 8485, Otherwise known as ‘The Animal Welfare Act of 1998’” was passed into law. In R.A. 10631, regulations pertaining to aquatic and marine animals are included. In addition, it included increased penalties for violations of the law and the deputation of Animal Welfare Enforcement Officers.

The Philippines ranked C amongst 50 countries in the Animal Protection Index (API). The API is an annual report published online by the World Animal Protection which establishes a ranking of countries according to their policy and legislation development in recognizing animal sentence, protecting animals and improving animal welfare. The API aims to encourage governments to improve the welfare of animals in their country through policy and attitudinal change an ultimately through enhanced legal protection.

To support Animal Welfare law, the Committee on Animal Welfare attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA-CAW) regularly meets towards policy formulation. The DA-CAW is represented by 14 institutions coming from government agencies, private groups, animal welfare groups, professional groups. A total of twenty eight (28) Administrative Circulars/Orders were passed for guidance and compliance of stakeholders. Some of which are being reviewed and amended to be consistent with OIE animal welfare standards. Other animal welfare standards and guidelines are continuously being drafted by the DA-CAW like Training and Deputation Guidelines for Animal Welfare Enforcement Officers, Implementing Guidelines for Animals Used in Entertainment. All regulations , standards undergo series of public consultation before finalization by the DA-CAW and endorsement to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval.

B. Government Initiatives

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) was mandated to implement the said law through the Animal Health and Welfare Division. BAI is committed to improve the welfare of animals in the Philippines and to enhance the positive relationship between humans and animals.

In enforcing the policies there are issues and challenges faced. Animal welfare groups are also very active in ensuring that right practices are promoted. One concern being raised is trade issues that involve handing, transport and slaughter of animals. But with efforts from various stakeholders and policy development (i.e. Administrative Orders/Circulars) crafted by the DA-CAW, these emerging issues are gradually addressed. Among these initiatives are the conduct of trainings supported by international agencies such as Australia’s Department of Agriculture and Forestry (DAF), World Animal Protection and OIE which were also beneficial in strengthening animal welfare in the country.

To strategically implement the animal welfare law in the country, Regional Animal Welfare Officers (RAWOs) were deputized from the Regulatory Division of the DA Regional Field Offices to facilitate the registration of animal facilities, conduct advocacy activities, and enforcement of the law. Meanwhile, the implementation of this law is also inherent to the function of the Local government units as stated in the Local Government Code.

In addition, RA 10631 provided the deputation of Animal Welfare Enforcement Officers (AWEOs) coming from NGOs, citizens groups, community organizations and other volunteers who have undergone the necessary training for this purpose. The Philippine National Police, the National Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies shall designate AWEOs. As
such, AWEOs shall have the authority to seize and rescue illegally traded and maltreated animals and to arrest violators of the law.

Being member of the DA-CAW, government line agencies showed participation and commitment in the implementation of animal welfare law. The Department of Interior and Local Government supervises compliance of local government units including implementation of the Animal Welfare Act, the National Meat Inspection Service oversees the humane handling and slaughter of food animals. The Biodiversity and Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources are on the conservation, protection and welfare of wildlife in the country.

The approved National Plan of Action to Eliminate the Trade of Dogs for Meat lays down the framework of various actions and program of actions of government and non-government organizations (NGO’s) to promote information, education, including arrest and apprehension of violators in order to stop the inhumane trade and risky distribution of its meat for human consumption.

C. Industry Initiatives

1. The National Animal Welfare Strategy Plan

The National Animal Welfare Strategy (NAWS) outlines the goals and components which provides the direction and basis for prioritizing activities and resources. In adherence to a holistic animal health and welfare program, the NAWS complements the rabies Elimination Program in advocating responsible pet ownership and a national plan of action on elimination of dog meat trade. The strategy covers the general welfare of companion and pet animals; livestock, poultry and other farm animals; aquatic and marine animals; and, wildlife animals. As the country experiences typhoon, earthquakes and other calamities, animal relief and animal rehabilitation efforts during disasters are included in the strategy. 

A progressive and informed Philippine society which respects, promotes, protects and advances animal welfare within the framework of international standards from now until 2020.

This document was developed through series of consultative meetings and workshops facilitated by the Bureau of Animal Industry-Animal Welfare Division (BAI-AWD) among various stakeholders. Animal welfare categories were defined to serve as guide in understanding concepts put forth in the NAWS. Further, general issues as well as gaps were identified which were considered in developing the objectives.

The four goals were set to provide direction for the specific objectives and plan of action to achieve the strategy’s vision:

- Goal 1: Animal welfare legislation is compliant with OIE animal welfare standards
- Goal 2: Coordinated approach to the implementation and enforcement of animal welfare legislation at the field level
- Goal 3: High level of understanding and awareness of animal welfare promoted and achieved through effective communication, education and training
- Goal 4: Sustainable mechanisms to implement, enforce, and promote animal welfare programs and priorities nationally

BAI encourages all government veterinary services and the veterinary profession as a whole to take a lead role in improvement of animal welfare in the Philippines. BAI firmly believes that through collaboration and strong partnerships with the relevant stakeholders an effective implementation tools at the national level will be facilitated. Some Animal Welfare advocates like the Animal Kingdom Foundation, Philippine Animal Welfare Society and other professional groups like the Philippine College of canine Practitioners (PCCP), Philippine College of Swine Practitioners (PCSP), Philippine Veterinary Medical Association (PVMA), Veterinary Practitioners Association of the Philippines (VPAP), Philippine Society of Animal Science (PSAS) as member and observers showed active participation and even chaired in Technical Working Groups (TWGs) formulating policies and implementing guidelines.

2. Animal Facility compliance and permits

To ensure protection and promotion of welfare of all terrestrial, aquatic and marine animals in the Philippines, all establishment and operations of all animal facilities shall be supervised and regulated by the BAI as stipulated in Section 1 of RA 10631. Such facilities utilized for breeding, maintaining, treating or training of animals either as object of trade or as household pets shall not operate without first securing a certificate of registration with the BAI. Increasing number of animal facility registration signals the industry initiative to comply with the regulations.
Animal welfare compliance is also a pre-requisite of other farm accreditation program ie, Swine Breeder Farm Accreditation Program, Cattle Breeder Farm Accreditation Program, PS Layer Accreditation Program, Good Animal Husbandry Practice Certification Program and issuance of shipping permits prior to transport of animals.

The Research and Academic group started complying with the law and guidelines on the humane use of laboratory animals in scientific procedures by improving laboratory facilities and the existence of the Institutional animal care and use committee and their Animal Care and Use Program. The implementation and information dissemination is through the collaborative efforts of the BAI and the Philippine Association of Laboratory Animal Science (PALAS).

The media and entertainment industry and the media regulatory board, film development council of the Philippines have started collaborating with BAI for their compliance on guidelines in the humane use of animals for media and entertainment.

D. Training

To promote and achieve a high level of understanding and awareness of animal welfare, an effective communication, education and training is necessary. BAI conducted several seminars and trainings in collaboration with DA RFOs, LGUs, academe, NGO partners ie Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF), World Animal Protection (WAP), Phil Association of Laboratory Animal Science (PALAS) and other stakeholders. Some of which are on Orientation Seminar on Animal Welfare, Trainings on Dog Pound Management, Humane Dog catching, responsible pet ownership, Euthanasia, Humane handling of food animals during loading, transport and slaughter (re-echo of the Improved Animal Welfare Program of OIE), Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS), Animal Rescue During Disasters.

Groups of poultry, swine, dairy animal raisers initiate meetings, seminars on animal welfare concept and animal welfare law compliance.

Academic groups have started incorporating in their curriculum animal welfare topics and the law.

E. Other Related Activities

1. Research Support

While animal welfare is not only a stand alone topic but a science, studies have been conducted internationally. Part of the animal welfare strategy is for the academe and other institutions to conduct researches and studies on animal welfare. Findings of such studies and researches are necessary to support the drafting of standards and guidelines on animal welfare which are adaptable under the Philippine context.

2. Conduct of related National Celebration and events on Animal Welfare like Animal Welfare Week Celebration, National Rabies Month, World Rabies Day spearheaded by the government. Animal Welfare Week is celebrated every first week of October with last year’s theme "ANIMAL WELFARE IS HUMAN WELFARE".

3. Pet Summit, Pet Trade, Animal Shows to create awareness and give information on animal welfare to pet lovers and the public.