

END OF YEAR REPORT 2024

COMMISSIONER FOR ANIMAL WELFARE
MALTA



Ms. Alison Bezzina (MA Lond) | March 2025



Table of Contents

FORWARD	2
2024 – Facing challenges, embracing progress	2
2024 – CAW ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES	4
Media Presence	4
Cat Microchipping Campaign	4
Improving Accessibility to Reporting Abuse or Neglect	5
Public Engagement and Support	5
Recognising Animal Welfare Achievements and Advancing Adoption Support	7
Overview of CAW's Recommendations	8
Summary update on the CAW's Official Recommendations Submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal Rights (MAFA).....	9
OTHER MILESTONES AND INITIATIVES	14
Animal Welfare Reform.....	14
National Animal Welfare Strategy	15
Malta's First Nationwide Animal Welfare Study	15
Four Vital Laws Passed for Animal Welfare	16
ONGOING STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES	16
Overpopulation, Accommodation and Neutering	16
Closure of 24/7 Hospital.....	17
Enforcement and Prosecution	17
COMMISSIONER'S FINAL NOTE.....	18
Shaping a Future of Compassionate Responsibility.....	18
GLOSSARY	19



FORWARD

2024 – Facing challenges, embracing progress



As Commissioner for Animal Welfare, our office may sometimes appear highly critical and demanding. However, this approach is central to our role in effecting meaningful change. While we have successfully reduced the need for formal investigations under CAP 439 compared to previous years through improved communication with the Directorate for Animal Welfare and the Veterinary Regulations Directorate, we remain fully prepared to launch objective investigations whenever

necessary. This balanced approach enables us to advocate for positive change while ensuring that every decision is made with the utmost fairness and commitment to improving the lives of animals nationwide.

During 2024, we celebrated the introduction of crucial legislation to regulate pet sitters, groomers, and the breeding of bully breed mixed dogs, addressing long-standing gaps in animal welfare legislation. Furthermore, a historic allocation of funds has enabled nationwide campaigns promoting animal welfare messages, significantly enhancing our outreach and impact. Additionally, this investment facilitated the commissioning of the first research study on public perceptions of various animal welfare issues, providing invaluable insights to guide future policies and initiatives. These findings have already begun to shape our approach to outreach and education efforts.



Despite these advancements, timeliness remains a persistent challenge. Delays within the Directorate of Animal Welfare in procuring essential products and services contribute to unnecessary suffering, as the slow pace of these processes hinders swift action when it's most critical. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles and misunderstandings about our office's authority continue to pose obstacles. Amidst these challenges, the unwavering dedication of NGOs, dedicated employees and volunteers remains vital. Their tireless commitment to advocating for animals, often in the face of immense obstacles, continues to drive meaningful change.

Despite the challenges, I remain hopeful about the future and committed to advancing the cause of animal welfare with resolve and compassion.

Alison Bezzina (MA Lond)

Commissioner for Animal Welfare



2024 – CAW ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

Media Presence

In line with CAP 439 ART 44A, which mandates the CAW to enhance public awareness and foster social dialogue on animal welfare, the Office of The Commissioner made significant strides in media engagement during 2024. We regularly participated in key animal-focused TV programs, including *Animal Diaries* on TVM, *Pink Panther* on One TV, and *Vučii Għall-Animali* on Net TV. These platforms allowed us to directly communicate vital messages about animal welfare to a wide audience. In addition to these regular appearances, we contributed to several daytime talk shows and news segments, both on radio and TV, further extending our reach. Our active presence on social media, where we shared educational and informative posts, played an essential role in engaging the public, raising awareness, and fostering ongoing dialogue on critical animal welfare issues.

Cat Microchipping Campaign

In collaboration with the Ministry for Agriculture, the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare (CAW) launched an extensive TV campaign aimed at promoting the microchipping of owned cats. While microchipping cats is not yet a legal requirement, as it is for dogs, the benefits of microchipping cats are undeniable. This initiative seeks to raise awareness about how microchipping can significantly improve the chances of reuniting lost cats with their owners, help identify abandoned or mistreated animals and enhance the overall safety and welfare of cats. The campaign includes a series of animated spots that explain these advantages in detail, providing a clear understanding of how microchipping works and why it is so beneficial. These animated spots, designed to be both informative and engaging, are being aired across all national TV stations, ensuring that the message reaches a wide audience. By promoting microchipping, CAW and the Ministry aim to encourage responsible pet ownership and prevent the growing issue of stray and lost cats. This campaign is part



of a broader effort to improve animal welfare standards and ensure that every cat has the protection and security it deserves, ultimately contributing to a safer, more accountable pet-owning society.

Improving Accessibility to Reporting Abuse or Neglect

Over the course of the year, the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare (CAW) played an active role in submitting and tracking requests for animal welfare inspections through the Enforcement Units of the Animal Welfare and Veterinary Regulations Directorates. While strictly speaking, CAW is not duty-bound to get involved in individual cases or reports of suspected abuse, and we also lack the resources and authority to conduct inspections ourselves, we sometimes take on this role to ensure concerns are addressed. These requests often came from members of the public who were unsure or reluctant to directly approach the Animal Welfare Directorate (AWD) or the Veterinary Regulations Directorate (VRD) due to a lack of confidence or concerns about the process. Acknowledging these barriers, CAW stepped in to bridge the gap, acting as an intermediary to ensure that these concerns were brought forward and addressed appropriately. By taking on this facilitating role, CAW made the process smoother for individuals, offering them a sense of assurance that their concerns were being taken seriously.

Public Engagement and Support

Drawing on our experience that the Animal Welfare Directorate and the Veterinary Regulations Directorate lack the necessary resources to address certain issues, the Commission provided support to numerous individuals, local councils, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private entities, and businesses in navigating a wide range of animal-related challenges.

From managing stray cat colonies to addressing roaming chickens, ducks, feral pigeons, and other animals causing community concerns, we provided practical solutions and guidance to ensure humane and responsible outcomes. Additionally, we offered the service of loaning cat traps, training



on their proper use, and providing guidance on neutering, enabling feeders and animal lovers to address stray cat issues effectively. By acting as a mediator, we frequently helped neighbours find common ground and negotiated workable approaches to these issues, a task that the Animal Welfare Directorate (AWD) would otherwise struggle to manage due to limited resources. This collaborative effort not only saved AWD valuable time and energy but also reinforced our commitment to promoting ethical and sustainable animal care practices within the community.

Educational Programs and School Publications

Throughout 2024, the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare (CAW), in partnership with the Animal Welfare Directorate (AWD) and in collaboration with The Ministry of Education, conducted a broad range of educational initiatives designed to teach young people the importance of animal care and responsibility. These interactive sessions were offered in schools, summer programs, and community centres, reaching students from various backgrounds and age groups. One such program, specifically targeted to Year 6 students, was conducted during their PSCD (Personal, Social, and Career Development) lessons. The program introduced important concepts such as responsible pet ownership, the ethical treatment of animals, and how to respond in emergencies, ensuring that students came away with a better understanding of animal welfare issues. In addition to these sessions, our office distributed educational posters and other materials during visits and lessons to further reinforce these messages and provide ongoing resources for students and educators. These materials serve as visual reminders of the key concepts taught, helping to maintain awareness and foster a sense of responsibility towards animal welfare long after the lessons have ended.

Building on previous years' success, CAW released an updated educational booklet for all schools involved in the program. This engaging resource, told through the eyes of a rescued cat named Molly, presented an inspiring story that captured the attention of young readers while subtly imparting



lessons about animal safety and compassion. Another collaborative project with AWD, *#bieb tal-Animali*, featured poems written by children, reflecting their love for their pets and reinforcing the positive emotional connection between humans and animals. Over the course of the year, we visited 65 schools and reached over 3,000 students, furthering our mission to raise awareness about the importance of responsible animal care and inspire the next generation to make a positive impact on animal welfare.

Recognising Animal Welfare Achievements and Advancing Adoption Support

In 2024, the Ministry for Agriculture hosted the third edition of the Animal Honours Awards, a heartfelt celebration recognising both people and animals for their outstanding contributions to animal welfare. Award recipients were celebrated for their compassion, tireless commitment, and remarkable efforts to enhance the lives of animals—a true testament to the transformative power of human kindness.

Our office also participated in the second edition of *Festa Animali*, an event that united animal care professionals and families for a day of fun and learning. In addition to the diverse activities available, we took the opportunity to distribute hundreds of free dog ID tags, highlighting their importance and benefits while reminding the public of this legal obligation. This initiative not only enhanced the festival experience but also reinforced our commitment to centring the event around what matters most—the well-being of our animal friends.

In parallel, CAW continued its efforts to simplify the adoption process by promoting AdoptAPet.gov.mt. This innovative online platform serves as a one-stop resource, featuring comprehensive profiles of animals awaiting new homes in sanctuaries across Malta and Gozo. With detailed information including photos, names, and ages, the site bridges the gap between shelters and families eager to welcome a loving companion.



Overview of CAW's Recommendations

As per the Animal Welfare Act CAP 439, Article 44A(e), the Commissioner for Animal Welfare (CAW) is entrusted with the responsibility to propose standards, guidelines, and regulations on animal welfare to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights and to the Animal Welfare Council.

In 2021, CAW presented 15 recommendations however, by 2022, it became clear that the number of recommendations was outpacing the Ministry's ability to implement them effectively. As a result, CAW decided to reduce the frequency of its official recommendations to ensure that there was adequate time for the Ministry to act on those already presented.

In May 2022, CAW took an active role in the public consultation for the National Animal Welfare Strategy, providing an extended platform to suggest further improvements. Two investigative reports that year also led to additional recommendations, which can be reviewed [here](#).

Throughout 2023, CAW remained deeply involved in animal welfare advocacy, making recommendations based on investigations, contributing to the animal welfare reform public consultation, and participating in the National Animal Welfare Strategy Committee. This participation continued in 2024, further strengthening CAW's ongoing commitment to shaping the future of animal welfare policy. Additionally, in 2024, CAW made three new recommendations, reinforcing its proactive stance on animal welfare matters. To date however, CAW has received no feedback on the last three recommendations made in June 2024.



Summary update on the CAW's Official Recommendations Submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal Rights (MAFA).

Recommendation 1: (submitted to MAFA in March 2021)

Enable the Directors of Animal Welfare and Veterinary Services to temporarily ban someone from keeping more animals after a confiscation. This ban would apply until the court decides otherwise or confirms the decision.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented but not yet invoked.

Recommendation 2: (submitted to MAFA in March 2021)

Increase the sizes of dog enclosures that are legally acceptable by law.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented.

Recommendation 3: (submitted to MAFA in March 2021)

Amend the law to give the court a wider possibility to ban people found guilty of animal cruelty from owning other animals.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented.

Recommendation 4: (submitted to MAFA in March 2021)

Dogs should not be permanently kept on roofs, garages, and yards.

This recommendation has still not been accepted and is still under discussion.



Recommendation 5: (submitted to MAFA in March 2021)

Stop cub petting in zoos.

This recommendation was accepted and partially implemented. Cub petting in zoos is now permitted only with prior approval from the Director of the Veterinary Regulations Directorate.

Recommendation 6: (submitted to MAFA in June 2021)

Regulations to license: Animal Trainers, Groomers, and Pet Sitters

This recommendation was accepted and partially implemented. Groomers and Pet Sitters are now fully regulated. Animal Trainers regulations are still under discussion.

Recommendation 7: (submitted to MAFA in June 2021)

Humane treatment of unowned farmed birds and pigeons

This recommendation has been accepted and implemented in principle, but the challenge of providing suitable habitats grows daily. Farmed birds, including chickens, roosters, ducks, and geese, are now scattered across the island, highlighting the urgent need for a dedicated sanctuary. Without such a facility, culling may soon become the only option.

Recommendation 8: (submitted to MAFA in June 2021)

More human resources for The Animal Welfare Directorate

This recommendation was accepted and included in the animal welfare reform document of May 2023. However, staffing within the Directorate remains uneven, with many roles—particularly inspectors, officers, dog walkers, trainers, and caregivers—still inadequately filled. In addition to necessary pre-job training, it's essential to evaluate staff on non-academic criteria, such as attitudes and soft skills in working with animals, as the qualifications of some low-level employees remain questionable.



Recommendation 9: (submitted to MAFA in June 2021)

Expressly outlaw bestiality.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented.

Recommendation 10: (submitted to MAFA in June 2021)

Given enough prima face evidence, the Director of AWD or VRD have the power to enter private property to save an animal without waiting 24 hours or pre-advising the owner.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented but not yet invoked.

Recommendation 11: (submitted to MAFA in September 2021)

A state-funded national neutering campaign for dogs and cats.

This recommendation was partially accepted and implemented, but only for cats. A state-funded national neutering campaign for dogs and cats was launched, with a strong start and good progress in neutering efforts. However, issues with procurement and other logistical challenges caused the campaign to frequently operate at full capacity, resulting in long waiting lists. By the end of 2024, the campaign came to a complete halt while awaiting new contractual agreements. Additionally, the campaign was limited in scope, as there were only one or two clinics available nationwide, with no satellite clinics around the country.

Recommendation 12: (submitted to MAFA in September 2021)

Better, stricter and enforced regulations on the breeding of dogs.

This recommendation has been fully accepted in principle but has only been implemented partially to regulate the breeding of mixed bully breeds.



Recommendation 13: (submitted to MAFA in September 2021)

Obligatory electronic Microchipping of pet cats.

This recommendation has not been accepted but it has been agreed to finance an awareness campaign about the benefits of microchipping pet cats. The campaign was launched in late 2024.

Recommendation 14: (submitted to MAFA in September 2021)

Improving and increasing dog-friendly beaches.

This recommendation has been accepted, and some additional dog-friendly beaches were announced in summer 2023.

Recommendation 15: (submitted to MAFA in September 2021)

A central online portal to kickstart all animal adoptions.

This recommendation was accepted and fully implemented. www.adoptapet.gov.mt

Recommendation 16: (submitted to MAFA in May 2022)

More dog friendly run free spaces.

This recommendation has been accepted but not implemented.

Recommendation 17: (submitted to MAFA in May 2022)

National census of captive animals in Malta and Gozo.

This recommendation has been accepted; however, its implementation is contingent upon the execution of the 2030 Household Census.



Recommendation 18: (submitted to MAFA in May 2022)

Improving the electronic microchipping system and its enforcement.

This recommendation has been accepted but not implemented.

Recommendation 19: (submitted June 2024)

Curbing the illegal practice of cropping dogs' ears

To date CAW has not received any feedback regarding this recommendation.

Recommendation 20: (submitted June 2024)

Introducing evening dog walking slots at AWD rehoming centre

To date CAW has not received any feedback regarding this recommendation.

Recommendation 21: (submitted June 2024)

Fiscal incentives to increase pet-friendly rentals

To date CAW has not received any feedback regarding this recommendation.



OTHER MILESTONES AND INITIATIVES

Animal Welfare Reform

In May 2023, a comprehensive three-year reform plan was introduced, aimed at overhauling the Animal Welfare Directorate and tackling systemic challenges. This initiative promised numerous changes across administrative, legislative, structural, and operational areas. Among the structural changes included:

1. **Cattery with Isolation Units for Sick Cats** – While this development initially led to significant improvements, ongoing reports regarding the level of care within the cattery continue to re-surface. What began as a high-standard facility has unfortunately declined, highlighting the need for immediate attention.
2. **New Dog Section with Increased Pen Capacity (100% Growth)** – Regrettably, during 2024 this project stalled, and the existing dog pens remain in poor condition, falling far short of the promised improvements.
3. **Pet Memorial and Rehoming Centre in Ta' Qali** – As of the end of 2024, both these facilities had not yet become operational.
4. **Development of Rehoming Centre in Ta' Qali** - Detailed plans for this project have been completed, but construction has yet to start, with no ETA in sight.

The full reform document can be accessed [here](#).



National Animal Welfare Strategy

The development of a National Animal Welfare Strategy marks a practical step towards addressing animal welfare issues in our society. CAW played a key role in shaping this strategy during 2023 and 2024, ensuring that a wide range of perspectives and expertise were considered. The completed strategy has now been submitted for review.

While the document lays out a comprehensive plan, its real impact will depend on effective implementation and timely action, avoiding the delays that have affected previous efforts in this area.

Malta's First Nationwide Animal Welfare Study

In 2024, one of the CAW's most significant efforts was commissioning Malta's first nationwide research study on public perceptions of animal welfare. Using a quantitative CATI approach, 516 respondents from Malta and Gozo provided crucial insights on enforcement, legal proceedings, public awareness, veterinary services, and pricing. The study revealed mixed views on law enforcement and sparked calls for a dedicated animal welfare magistrate. These findings will help guide CAW's evidence-based policy proposals and lay a strong foundation for continual improvements in animal welfare law and practice.

Access the full study [here](#)



Four Vital Laws Passed for Animal Welfare

In 2024, the Commissioner for Animal Welfare achieved more significant milestones with the passage of four essential legislative proposals. The first introduced regulations for pet groomers, ensuring higher standards of care during grooming procedures. The second created a legal framework for pet sitters, and the third regulates the breeding and keeping of mixed bully breed dogs. The fourth legislation modernised zoo standards across Malta and Gozo by restricting visitor interactions with exotic species and imposes tighter controls on exotic breeding practices. These measures aim to minimize animal stress and ensure ethical treatment in captivity, significantly addressing concerns over zoo animal welfare and enhancing overall management practices. Each new law emerged from collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders, setting the stage for ongoing reforms and continuous improvements in animal welfare practices.

ONGOING STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES

Overpopulation, Accommodation and Neutering

Shortage of suitable accommodation for abandoned animals remains a significant issue, leading to overcrowded facilities. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the national neutering campaign for dogs has been limited to certain breeds and has not been adequately promoted to make a significant impact. Meanwhile, the cat neutering campaign started with strong momentum but encountered several obstacles that slowed progress and ultimately hindered its effectiveness. These challenges, combined with the lack of comprehensive services such as trapping and transportation of animals to and from veterinarian clinics, have prevented the campaigns from reaching their full potential. Offering a complete service would have greatly enhanced their success, ensuring a more widespread and effective approach to managing the animal population.



Closure of 24/7 Hospital

A significant challenge has been the closure of the APH Veterinary Hospital in Ta' Qali, the only 24-hour veterinary facility on the island, which has now been closed for almost two years. Despite some clinics offering round-the-clock care, essential services such as X-rays, ultrasounds, and overnight stays are only available at a few facilities, leaving a major gap in emergency veterinary care. This prolonged closure has made it increasingly difficult for pet owners and veterinarians to access critical services outside of regular hours, and with no real alternatives in place, the situation continues to strain both animals and those responsible for their care. Moreover, the information and visibility surrounding this issue have been confusing and contradictory, with no clear direction or solutions in sight.

Enforcement and Prosecution

While Malta's animal welfare legislation is considered one of the best in Europe on paper, the resources needed to effectively enforce, monitor, and prosecute violations remain severely lacking. Despite the strong legal framework, the absence of sufficient funding and personnel to ensure proper implementation undermines the effectiveness of these laws, leaving significant gaps in enforcement and accountability.



COMMISSIONER'S FINAL NOTE

Shaping a Future of Compassionate Responsibility

Looking ahead, our main aim as a Commission remains to push animal welfare to the top of Malta's national agenda, as we believe this will create the most profound and lasting impact on the system. When adequate financial and human resources are allocated, and accountability becomes a priority, we can ensure meaningful change. This will require continued collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and the public to ensure that animal welfare is not sidelined but treated with the urgency and importance it deserves.

However, we cannot achieve this alone. The public plays a critical role by keeping animal welfare at the forefront whenever they engage with authorities and politicians, and by refusing to turn a blind eye to abuse or neglect. Supporting local NGOs, whether through time, donations, or spreading awareness, also makes a significant impact. By speaking out, sharing information, and putting pressure on decision-makers, we can drive systemic change.

By continuing to demand better treatment for animals, I am hopeful that we can foster a society where their protection is not a privilege, but a basic expectation for all.

Alison Bezzina (MA Lond)

Commissioner for Animal Welfare



GLOSSARY

CAW	–	Commissioner for Animal Welfare
MAFA	–	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights
AWD	–	Animal Welfare Directorate
VRD	–	Veterinary Regulations Directorate
AW	–	Animal Welfare