



RECOMMENDATIONS 2025

3 (OF 24) RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED TO
HON ANTON REFALO
MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES,
FOOD AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

AND

HON ALICIA BUGEJA SAID
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR FISHERIES,
AQUACULTURE AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

BY

THE COMMISSIONER FOR ANIMAL WELFARE -
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22. Closing a Harmful Loophole in Animal Sanctuary Regulations

(Given that this is considered a minor amendment it was already proposed via email in December 2023 with no feedback to date)

Current Situation

SL439.14 Article 6(2)(a) mandates that animals entering sanctuaries must be placed in isolation for at least 7 days. The spirit of this law is intended to apply to lost animals, providing a period for owners to reclaim their pets or for necessary veterinary care and treatment. This isolation period ensures that animals who may have been lost are given a chance to be reunited with their owners. However, the law currently applies this same 7-day isolation period to animals that are willingly surrendered by their owners, which creates a loophole. During this 7-day isolation period, animals cannot be adopted out, meaning that they remain in sanctuaries, occupying valuable space and resources that could be used for other animals in need.

The Problem

This loophole allows owners to use sanctuaries as free boarding facilities, reclaiming their pets after 7 days without any repercussions, but also gives them the opportunity to change their minds about surrendering. In some cases, this means that dogs could return to a less-than-ideal situation, where the conditions may not improve. Additionally, this delay often means the animals miss out on good adoption opportunities, as potential adopters may find other pets or the situation could become less ideal for the dog.

Commissioner's Recommendation

Stray or unregistered animals should continue to undergo the 7-day isolation period, allowing time for owners to reclaim them or for veterinary treatment as needed.

For animals that are willingly surrendered, with the ownership formally transferred, the 7-day waiting period for owner reclamation should not apply. Instead, these animals should be eligible for immediate rehoming. The 7-day isolation period can be traumatic for animals used to a family home, and if this period can be avoided, it should be. This will help prevent unnecessary stress for the animals and allow them to be placed in a loving home without delay.



23. Protecting Animals from Fireworks Noise

Current Situation

Current laws in Malta control fireworks by setting limits on their size and regulating when and where they can be used near residential areas. However, these rules mainly focus on human safety and do not address the negative impact that the loud noise of fireworks can have on animals.

The Problem

There is no specific law protecting animals from the harmful effects of fireworks noise, but research shows that loud sounds can cause significant stress and anxiety in animals. Pets, for example, often react to fireworks by trembling, hiding, or becoming overly vocal. Additionally, repeated exposure to high noise levels can lead to long-term stress and behaviour problems. Research indicates that loud noises can elevate animals' heart rates and stress hormone levels, and prolonged noise-induced stress may result in disruptive behaviours and a decline in overall well-being. Beerda, B., Schilder, M. B. H., van Hooff, J. A. R. A. M., de Vries, H. W., & Mol, J. A. (1998). Manteuffel, G., & Lewejohann, L. (2007). These findings clearly indicate the need for legal measures that protect animals from the distress caused by fireworks noise.

Commissioner's Recommendation

While fireworks are an important part of Maltese culture, it is crucial to ensure that their use does not compromise animal welfare. I recommend the updating of existing animal welfare laws to include protection from noise pollution by establishing clear limits on noise levels during fireworks displays and providing guidelines to minimize their harmful effects on animals.

In addition, as an immediate step, fireworks should not be allowed in areas where animals are most at risk, including farms with farm animals, shelters housing domestic pets, and any other location where animals cannot be easily relocated to a quieter area.

Furthermore, I propose an incentive to adopt silent fireworks as a viable alternative. Silent fireworks, which produce minimal noise while still providing visual enjoyment, have already been successfully implemented in several countries.

This combined approach will help create a balanced framework that honours tradition and ensures that animals are not subjected to unnecessary distress during fireworks events.



24. Monetary Allowances for Fostering Animals

Current Situation

Fostering animals on behalf of The Animal Welfare Directorate is vital for alleviating overcrowding, rehabilitating vulnerable animals, and preparing them for adoption. Currently, fosterers receive occasional support—typically in the form of food, nappies, and access to the Directorate’s veterinary services—but this help is provided on an ad hoc basis and is insufficient to meet the ongoing demands of animal fostering.

The Problem

The sporadic provision of resources fails to address the ongoing and often substantial costs associated with animal fostering. While fosterers benefit from intermittent support, there is no structured system to consistently cover essential needs such as food, bedding, and additional veterinary care. Additionally, fosterers invest significant personal time, expertise, and out-of-pocket expenses without any formal compensation.

Recommendation

It is recommended that The Animal Welfare Directorate establish a standardized monetary allowance for animal fosterers. Such an allowance would:

- Compensate fosterers for their time and expertise.
- Consistently cover a range of expenses including food, bedding, and emergency veterinary care.
- Acknowledge the personal financial commitment that fosterers make to ensure the well-being of animals in their care.

To put this into perspective, consider the support provided in child fostering, where foster parents receive a monetary allowance of €120 per week (€6,240 per year per child). It is my informed prediction that implementing a similar, allowance system for animal fosterers would not only alleviate their financial burden but also encourage greater participation, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the animals and a more robust foster care system overall.