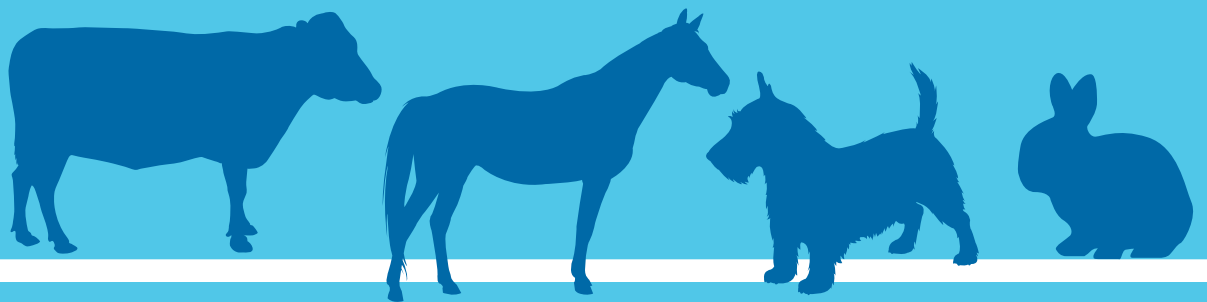




# Welfare of Animals in Northern Ireland



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

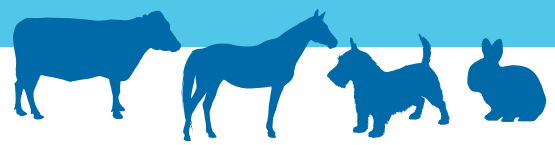


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The purpose of this document is to act as a reference document on the subject matter of 'animal welfare in Northern Ireland', for the Equella Library of the Education Authority.

The contents are laid out as follows:

- Introduction (animal welfare in Northern Ireland);
- What does the law say?  
causing an animal to suffer, failing to meet the needs of an animal, some examples;
- What happens if a person breaks the law?; and
- Further information.



# Introduction

## Animals in Northern Ireland

There are many animals that live in Northern Ireland. They can be separated into two groups: vertebrates and invertebrates.

Vertebrates are animals that have a backbone. Some examples are cows, dogs, birds, and fish. Invertebrates are animals that do not have a backbone. Some examples are spiders, slugs and flies.

In Northern Ireland, animals are either living in the wild, or living under the control of a person. Animals that are living under the control of a person are either:

- kept by a farmer (a farmed animal); or
- kept as a pet, or as a companion animal (a non-farmed animal).

## Welfare of animals in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the welfare of vertebrate animals is protected by a piece of legislation called the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This Act sets out requirements for both farmed animals, and non-farmed animals.

Farmed animals are those animals which are bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farmed purposes. In Northern Ireland, farmed animals are usually cows; sheep; and pigs.

Non-farmed animals are those animals which are not bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farmed purposes. In Northern Ireland, non-farmed animals are usually dogs; cats; and horses. Another example of a non-farmed animal is a pet micro-pig.

The Act is enforced by three bodies:

- the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA);
- local Councils; and
- the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

These three enforcement bodies work with one common aim – the protection of animals. DAERA is responsible for enforcement in respect of farmed animals; local Councils are responsible for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals; and the PSNI is responsible for enforcement in respect of crime against wild animals, animal fighting, and welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved.

DAERA has produced a quick guide to animal welfare (“Animal Welfare Quick Guide”), and it is available at the following link: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/animal-welfare-enforcement-stat-quick-guide-final.PDF>

# What does the law say?

The 2011 Act states that animals which are commonly domesticated, and animals which live under the control of man, are protected.

A person who owns, or is responsible for an animal, even on a temporary basis, must care for it properly and take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met.

## Suffering

It is against the law to cause an animal to suffer unnecessarily. This includes a person:

- carrying out an act that causes unnecessary suffering; and
- failing to act and therefore causing unnecessary suffering.

## Needs of animals

It is against the law to fail to ensure that the needs of an animal are met. The 2011 Act sets out five needs of animals:

- its need for a suitable environment;
- its need for a suitable diet;
- its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

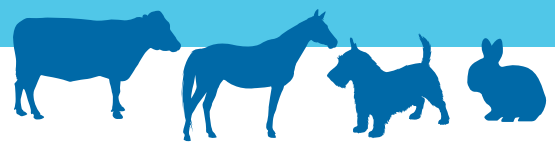
## How to care for animals

Different animals have different needs. DAERA has produced Codes of Practice to provide practical guidance on caring for particular animals. These Codes set out minimum standards of care and are based on good practice and scientific knowledge. People are encouraged to exceed these minimum standards.

Where appropriate, the Codes point to welfare requirements in other pieces of legislation, for example, requirements in the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

The Codes can be accessed at the links listed below:

- Farmed animals (for example beef cattle, dairy cattle, meat chicken, sheep, laying hens, and pigs): [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-farmed-animals](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-farmed-animals)
- Pets and horses (non-farmed animals) (for example cats, dogs, horses, non-human primates, and rabbits): [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-non-farmed-animals](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-non-farmed-animals)



## How to care for animals - some examples

Some examples of the needs of specific animals, and of the advice contained in the DAERA Codes of Practice, are listed below. Anyone who is responsible for the care of any of these animals should refer to the Code of Practice for more detailed advice.

### Farmed animals

- for beef cattle, stock-keepers should regularly assess the type and condition of any track on which the cattle are moved and the distance from housing to pasture;
- for dairy cattle, cows will have a specific walking order on farm lanes that is different to the milking order. Handlers should allow cows time and space to rearrange their position in the collection area before entering the parlour;
- for meat chickens, flock-keepers must monitor all birds for signs of lameness, leg weakness or abnormal gait at each inspection;
- for sheep, which are a flock species and are greatly stressed by separation from the flock, they should be kept with (or see) other sheep, except where they are isolated for veterinary reasons;
- for laying hens, the lighting regime in the hen house must provide in each 24 hour period at least a minimum period of 8 hours continuous darkness; and
- for pigs, which enjoy exploratory and manipulation activities, provide enrichment material to stimulate and interest all the pigs. Change and alternate this material to maintain the pigs' interest.

### Non-farmed animals

- for cats, do not force a cat to interact with people or animals that it does not like, and make sure it can avoid them;
- for dogs, make sure your dog has opportunities to spend enough time with people and friendly dogs so that it is less likely to become bored or lonely;
- for horses, some breeds have thick coats and are capable of living outdoors throughout the year;
- for donkeys, which do not have waterproof coats, shelter from the rain is required;
- for non-human primates, for example monkeys such as the squirrel monkey or the marmoset, both indoor and outdoor enclosures should be provided and should be of a suitable size, including sufficient vertical space; and
- for rabbits, which are very active and athletic, provide daily access to an exercise area so that the rabbit can exercise appropriately, for example, crawling, hopping, running, and jumping on and off raised areas.

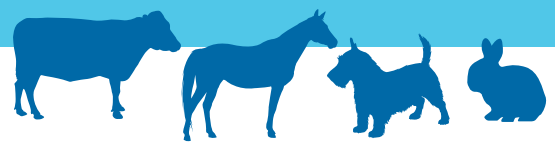
# What happens if a person breaks the law?

Officers will investigate any animal welfare related complaints that they receive, and where appropriate will take action such as: giving advice, issuing verbal and written warnings, issuing legally binding Improvement Notices, and taking animals into their possession.

The Act also enables the enforcement bodies to pursue prosecution. This can lead to the person who broke the law being sentenced to, for example:

- up to 12 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £20,000 (summary conviction for causing unnecessary suffering);
- up to 5 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine (indictable conviction for causing unnecessary suffering); and
- up to 6 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000 (summary conviction for failing to meet the needs of animals).

DAERA produces an annual report, called the Animal Welfare Service Delivery Statistical Bulletin, on its website. The report contains the statistical information relating to DAERA, local Councils, and the PSNI delivery of the animal welfare service. It is available on the DAERA website, at the following link: [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/animal-welfare-statistics](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/animal-welfare-statistics)



# Further information

**Other useful information is available at the following locations.**

## **The DAERA website**

- Animal Welfare:  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare)
- Animal Welfare Quick Guide:  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/animal-welfare-enforcement-stat-quick-guide-final.PDF](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/animal-welfare-enforcement-stat-quick-guide-final.PDF)
- Codes of Practice (minimum standards of care):  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farmed-and-non-farmed-animal-welfare](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farmed-and-non-farmed-animal-welfare)

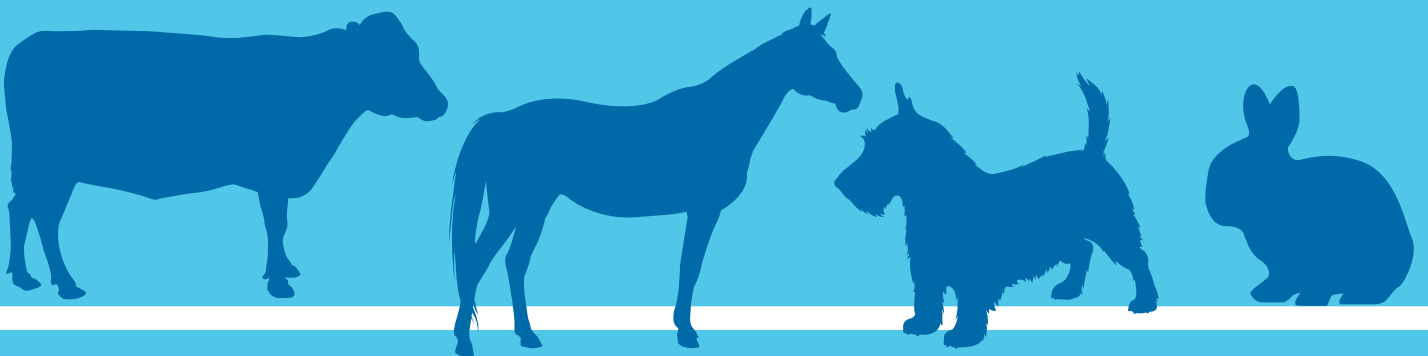
## **The NI Direct Website**

- Animal Welfare:  
[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/animal-welfare](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/animal-welfare)
- Links to local Councils:  
[www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland)

## **The Equella Library:**

- DAERA reference document on “Buying and caring for a puppy”

ISBN: 978-1-84807-898-7



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