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# Animal welfare groups file complaint with Ombudsman over EU Commission's caged-farming ban failure

24 Nov 2023 --- Over 30 animal protection organizations have lodged an official complaint with the European Ombudsman against the European Commission's (EC) failure to uphold its commitment to a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) in which 1.4 million citizens asked for a ban on cages in animal farming.

In its answer to the "[End the Cage Age](#)" (ECI), published in June 2021, the EC promised that by the end of 2023, it would put forward a legislative proposal to phase out and eventually prohibit the use of cages for the listed animal species.

However, in the recent work program for the rest of the political term, the Kept Animals Regulation, which should have included the plan, [was missing](#). This omission means the regulation will be left to the next Commission, creating uncertainty on when the promised regulation will be published.

"The EC made clear expectations to citizens, but in the moment of truth, has let them down," says Reineke Hamelers, CEO at Eurogroup for Animals.

"This calls into question a core value of EU Institutions: democracy. The ECI was purposely launched to allow citizens to actively participate in policy-making processes. But what good does that do if their voices continue to be unheard?"

While the regulation to phase out cages stalls, a reported 700 million farm animals continue to suffer in cages in Europe each year.

## Democratic failure?

In their complaint to the Ombudsman, the organizations claimed the EC has failed to act in accordance with the rules governing ECIs after generating "legitimate expectations" among European citizens.

"These shortcomings present a case of maladministration, both in light of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 and the very raison d'être of ECIs as an instrument of transnational democracy," they say.



The "End the Cage Age" ECI calls on the Commission to propose legislation to ban the use of cages in animal farming.

Prior to backtracking from its promise, the EC repeatedly confirmed it was working toward the 2023 timeline, with multiple mentions of this date being made publicly by Stella Kyriakides, commissioner for health and food safety, in the EC's answers to parliamentary questions, at the EU Platform on Animal Welfare and in various communications on the Farm to Fork Strategy.

However, EC President Ursula von der Leyen [faced criticism](#) in September, including from several MEPs, after failing to address animal rights in her State of the European Union speech, in which she outlined priorities for the remainder of the year.

Before making the official complaint to the Ombudsman, the animal protection organizations formally asked the Commission to come forward with a definite timeline for the publication of the legislative proposals within the current term to fulfill its obligation to the ECI.

But, the animal protection groups say the EC has failed to provide an exhaustive reply to this request.

## Future-proof farming

The animal protection organizations argue a delay in the release of updated animal welfare legislation will also cost European farmers and food businesses, as this is a time when

they need to reinvest in farming systems. "Unless they get a clear indication, they might invest in systems that are not future-proof," they say.

COPA-COGECA, which describes itself as "the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU," tells us animal welfare is crucial for European farmers and cooperatives and it is committed to ensuring it.

The industry body points out that the EU already has some of the highest levels of animal welfare in the world and insists that any animal welfare legislative reforms must be science-based and "respect economic and social viability."

"Current legislation has allowed for a continuous process of harmonization, better implementation and an overall improvement in animal welfare conditions," a spokesperson says.



In more positive news for animal welfare reforms, the European Parliament approved the EU-New Zealand free trade agreement this week, [marking the first time](#) the EU has ratified a trade deal limiting market access based on animal welfare standards.

Although the deal liberalizes trade in most animal-based products and will likely stimulate animal agriculture in the EU and New Zealand, the beef quota is restricted to grass-fed animals and explicitly excludes feedlots.

**By Joshua Poole**

To contact our editorial team please email us at [editorial@cnsmedia.com](mailto:editorial@cnsmedia.com)

