

SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AWRN

DATE: 18/01/2023

GREAT NORTH MUSEUM, NEWCASTLE, UK.

WEDNESDAY 18TH AND THURSDAY 19TH JANUARY 2023 – NEWCASTLE

Session 1 – The Role of Animal Welfare Science in Society

Gareth Arnott, the Network Lead, welcomed everyone and introduced the meeting's theme: "Animal Welfare Science and Society". The meeting would explore and reflect on the current relationship between science and society, how this might develop to better serve animal and human wellbeing, and the implications for research and policy.

The Network's ECR Representatives, Juliette Schillings and Andrew Crump, then introduced our inaugural ECR plenary by Helen Gray. Using her own studies as examples, Helen discussed open science in the context of animal welfare research. She enthusiastically encouraged us to pre-register our studies; share our data, code and methods; and publish in open-access journals. Helen also highlighted challenges surrounding the potential sensitivity of our datasets, and that historically disadvantaged groups may find it harder to adopt such practices (e.g., minorities, those in unstable employment and ECRs). Especially for an ECR, this was a fantastic plenary, and both Helen and the Network has lots of ideas to promote open science going forward.



Following this Amy Jackson talked about her work exploring the relationships between dairy cows, farmers and the public. She described the results of their survey on which aspects of dairy farming are most important to the public (access to grazing, health and welfare, and comfort) and outcomes of face to face interviews (mixed system allowing access to nature and protection for cows). She concluded that to improve public perception of dairy farming there may need to be willingness to change systems to meet those societal expectations.

Siobhan Mullan then gave a talk in which she described current UK welfare standards and how we need, but do not have equivalent standards on imported products. She then described the four domains for policy leadership in farm animal welfare (animal welfare standards, animal welfare policy co-ordination, consumer and supply chain

initiatives and animal welfare knowledge) and how these work together to improve welfare. She finished by telling us how they are forming a Forum for International Animal Welfare Governance which will potentially help bring countries together to work on the four policy domains.

After that, Donald Broom got us all thinking about the consequences of “one biology”. This is the idea that human/animal divisions (e.g., between human and veterinary medicine) are artificial and impede scientific progress. Apologies to Don that the meeting’s theme was not “*Non-human Animal Welfare Science and Society*”!

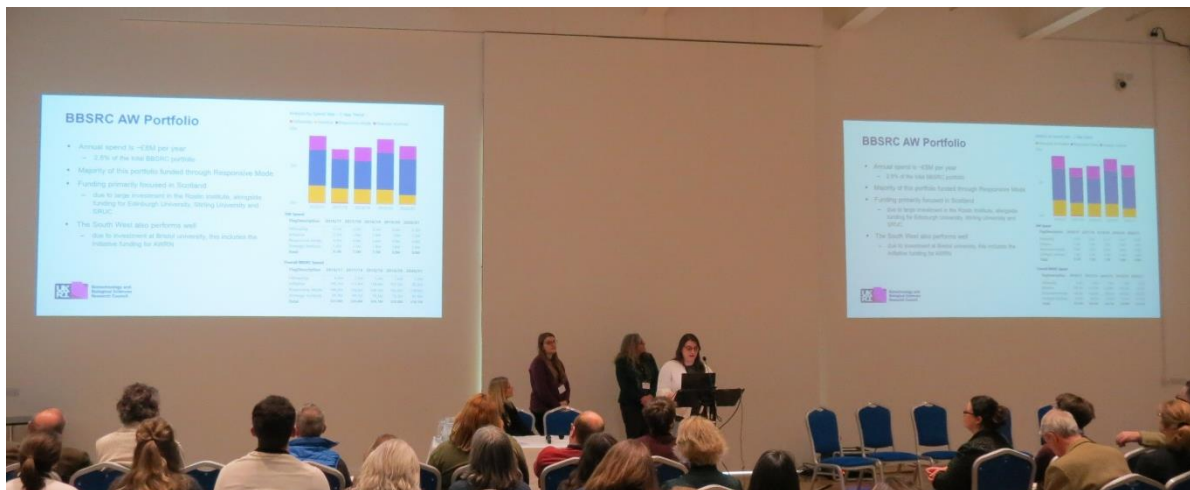
To finish the first session, we had a joint plenary from Siobhan Mullan (UCD) and Alex Rattee (Defra). Defra’s Animal Health and Welfare Pathway has been developing a 'Payment by Results' scheme for farm animal welfare, and Siobhan and her team have spent the last two years evaluating its effectiveness. They each reflected on how animal welfare scientists can successfully engage with government. This was a great case-study of both stakeholders working together to develop effective, evidence-based policy.



Session 2 – Perspectives and Understanding of Stakeholders

Gina Caplen, the Network’s Industry Link Officer, began this session by introducing our new Stakeholder Advisory Board. This led seamlessly into a series of six presentations from different stakeholders, each talking about “What they value, what they think of as animal welfare and the priorities to be addressed to meet societal needs”.

Matthew Barnbrook highlighted that there are around 85 members of the Animal Welfare policy team at Defra. Their definition of animal welfare might well start with animal welfare legislation but also go beyond it to guidance and campaigns, we loved the example of “Petfished: who is the person behind the pet”. He emphasised that evidence really matters to Defra and that their routes of gathering evidence include calls for evidence, public consultations and staying in touch with academia. Perhaps most important was the message about what they value; research to help develop better policies, seeing proposals and outputs and last (and possibly most important) co-funding! The take away message they want researchers to feel empowered to contact them about potentially policy relevant pieces of work, so please do get in touch with Matthew or Alex Rattee.



BBSRC then took the stand with Stephanie Masefield, Nikki Mackie and Linda Millyard describing how BBSRC’s strategic planning is informed by a range of schemes including Strategy Advisory Panels (do consider applying when vacancies come up). They highlighted a few key projects including a Stakeholder Engagement Report which is coming out soon and their policy work including internships and impact acceleration accounts (unlock the impact of your research). They finished by flagging some key funding opportunities, and emphasises that we have the Animal Welfare Spotlight for two more BBSRC calls this year and should make the most of it and apply. They have shared their slides which are full of links to the schemes they describe and they will be uploaded to the website alongside the videos of the talks.

Iain Berrill from Salmon Scotland then gave us the perspectives of a producer highlighting that whilst animal welfare is academically complex he would like to think it could quite simply be “a good life and a good death”. He talked about the additional challenges of assessing welfare in fish and how they are trying to measure positive welfare on their farms.

We then heard from John Kirkpatrick about the perspectives of Tesco. John highlighted that their poultry sector holds 8 years of continuous, monthly-reported Welfare Outcome Measures, equating to 11.5 million broiler birds in each reporting period. He highlighted that we need to improve dialogue so that commercial stakeholders understand the requirements and constraints of academic approaches and that researchers understand the commercial scale that is in operation.

Next up was Justine Shotton, Senior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association (BVA). She described their Animal Welfare Strategy and how in 2017 they highlighted 17 agreed policy priorities and have made improvements to many of them through policy and advocacy. She outlined their policy priorities for 2023 including a focus on the Kept Animals Bill and Welfare at Slaughter.

Finally in this section was Jane Tyson from RSPCA who talked about their five core beliefs and how they assess if animals have good welfare and a life worth living. She described some of the key findings of the PDSA PAW report, highlighted their animal welfare priorities (including pandemic acquisitions and cost of living crisis, online sales and advice, appearance over welfare) and described the need to embed human behaviour change in every campaign.

Session 3 – Breakout Groups

The last session of the day offered delegates a choice between three Breakout Groups:

1. **A (brief) Introduction to Scottish Salmon Farming:** Iain Berrill (Salmon Scotland)
2. **Animal Welfare Science: aims, priorities and defining animal welfare:** eva rose read (LSE)
3. **How to Conference: An ECR's Guide:** Kate Lewis (University of Portsmouth) and Juliette Schillings (University of Reading)

Although the Breakout Groups were not recorded, summaries are being put together and will be available online.

Session 4 – Welcome and Novel Developments in Animal Welfare Science

This session focused on new scientific findings – the foundation of taking science into society. Gareth Arnott welcomed everyone back and outlined some of the Network's upcoming initiatives: the Kick-Start Funding Scheme, Lab Exchange Scheme, and Mentoring Scheme re-launch. We then heard brief descriptions of the five workshops that the AWRN is hosting this year. Lots to look forward to in 2023!

In the first presentation, Fiona French introduced us to Animal-Computer Interactions. Fiona has been working with zoos to create high-tech enrichment, and she encouraged us all to get involved. Lucy Oldham then delivered our third plenary, which explored the factors that influence aggression in pigs (“experience, emotions and everyone else”). Lucy's work applied principles from behavioural ecology, such as animal contest theory, to this applied welfare issue. In one particularly memorable demonstration, she asked us all to stand up and assess whether we could win a fight against the delegate beside us (I was not confident). This was a fun and thoughtful way to show how pigs might assess their opponents' fighting ability or “resource holding potential”. Overall, the plenary was brilliant – even the *T. rex* in the next gallery was impressed!



We then had an excellent presentation from Jasmine Clarkson on humane alternatives to carbon dioxide killing in rats. Jasmine's research suggests that gradual decompression leads to fewer indicators of distress, and she argued that it could be practically implemented in labs. Next, Janire Castellano Bueno discussed welfare indicators, and their relationship to involvement in invasive experiments, in lab macaques. This relied on a remarkably long-term dataset, stretching back nearly ten years. The session ended with two great elevator pitches, where presenters only had three minutes each. Johnny Roughan discussed non-aversive handling in mice, whilst Farhana Chowdhury talked about improving animal welfare through human behaviour change.

Session 5 – Taking Animal Welfare Science into Society

This session began with Simon Turner discussing open science and impact in the AWRN. Jonathan Birch then delivered the third plenary, on animal sentience and policy. Jonathan discussed his role advising Defra on the scope of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022. In response to Jonathan and his colleagues' recommendations, the legislation was expanded to include certain invertebrates (cephalopod molluscs and decapod crustaceans). This encapsulated the meeting's theme of using science (in Jonathan's case, reviewing over 300 studies) to shape society and our treatment of animals. Finally, we had four more elevator pitches. Thanks to Beth Clark, Juliette Schillings, Eleanor Jordan and Lydia Lanzoni, we covered creative public engagement strategies, digital livestock technologies as boundary objects, the role of adopter and dog demographics in decisions to get a dog, and integrating animal welfare into Life Cycle Assessment – all in 20 minutes. Phew!



Session 6 – Breakout Groups

Delegates could then choose between two Breakout Groups:

1. **Invertebrate Sentience and Welfare:** Jonathan Birch (LSE)
2. **How do we improve useability of animal welfare science information to stakeholders to maximise impact?** Simon Turner (SRUC)

Again, the Breakout Groups were not recorded but the summaries will be available online.

Session 7 – Taking Animal Welfare Science into Society

The last session of the meeting was also the shortest, due to some essential last-minute re-jigging. First up was Megan Powell from Tesco introducing the Tesco Sustainable Beef Group, a group of 900 Aberdeen Angus producers who are undertaking reporting and benchmarking of antibiotic usage and other sustainable practices. They demonstrated a 32% reduction in antibiotic usage from 2020 to 2021 and farmers described their motivations for doing so as primarily wanting to reduce antibiotic use and improve animal health and welfare.

Finally, David Bowles introduced us to the RSPCA's "Animal Kindness Index". This is a poll that the RSPCA will carry out annually to understand the UK public's views on animal welfare. Another brilliant example of the complex interrelationships between our science and society.

Final Thoughts

After not having an in-person AWRN Annual Meeting since 2019, it was wonderful to see everyone “live” again (even if Newcastle in January was not *quite* the original plan). The meeting’s theme, “Animal Welfare Science and Society”, lent itself to invaluable networking opportunities, not just with other scientists, but also representatives from government, industry, and NGOs. It was fascinating to hear from these diverse stakeholders and identify areas where we can collaborate to improve animal welfare. I think we all left the meeting fizzing with ideas for how the network can better serve its diverse and growing membership. Watch this space!

Now for the thank yous... First, to our fantastic Chairs (Anna Roberts, Lucy Oldham, Paula Baker, Andrew Crump, Sarah Kappel and Fiona French), who were all early career researchers again this year. Thanks also to Gareth Arnott and the rest of the Coordinating Group. I’m very grateful for all your work inviting speakers, reviewing abstracts and running breakout groups. Special thanks to Lucy Asher, Carole Fureix, Juliette Schillings and Andrew Crump for their help and hard work organising the meeting, to Richard Bennett coming up with the original concept of this meeting.

I’d also like to thank the network’s tireless new ECR Committee (Paula Baker, Fiona French, Helen Gray, Tayla Hammond, Ben Lecorps, Kate Lewis, Lucy Oldham, Maeve Palmer and Lisa Schanz), who welcomed our ECRs with all manner of activities and events. There was pre-conference drinks, an ECR Dinner, ECR Breakout Group, lunchtime networking session, a walk and even a Monthly Meet-up afterwards summarising the meeting for ECRs who could not attend. I think our ECRs really appreciated this, and it made a big difference to their experience, especially those attending their first conference. Personally, I would like to see these become part of every Annual Meeting in the future. Finally I would like to thank Andrew Crump for his help in writing this report!

If you would like to watch the fantastic talks, they will soon be on the website for AWRN members to view. Simply login and select “Meeting Presentations”, then “Annual Meetings” then “Seventh Annual Meeting” to see every available talk and resource. Please get in touch if you have any questions.