

Animal Protection Organizations and Public Policy

The Case of the Netherlands

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Progressive political changes for animals in the Netherlands have been more robust and rapid than what has been achieved in most other countries, yet there is minimal English-language scholarship on Dutch strategies for animal protection and cruelty investigations. After outlining the most salient political and legal dimensions, this paper explains the network of animal protection infrastructure, organizations, and public policy in the Netherlands. We conclude by identifying key insights that can be learned from the Dutch context including the importance of stable public funding for animal-focused investigative work, the value of proactive inspections, and the benefits of a national hotline for reporting animal maltreatment.

Keywords:
Animal cruelty investigations; animal protection organizations; the Netherlands; animal police; animals in public policy; humane law enforcement

In the spring of 2020, World Animal Protection released its second Animal Protection Index. The Index assigns a letter grade to 50 countries based on their animal welfare policies and legislation. The Netherlands earned a B, the highest grade given to only a handful of countries. Notably, the assessors state that “The Netherlands is an example for other countries to follow in order to effectively allocate governmental and financial resources to animal welfare” (World Animal Protection, 2020).

As in many Western countries, animal issues have been gaining greater public and political attention in the Netherlands. The progressive changes in the Netherlands, however, have been more robust and rapid than what has been achieved in most other countries. Cultural and political factors have raised the profile of animal issues in Dutch society, and this has led to noteworthy animal welfare accomplishments. For instance, the country has dramatically reduced, if not eliminated, the number of stray dogs, owing to the work of animal welfare organizations, changes in the way citizens perceive dogs, the financial prosperity of the Netherlands during the 20th and 21st century, and government funding for spay and neuter services (Verduyn, 2012; Bordes, 2005; Sternheim, 2012).

Moreover, the accomplishments in the country extend beyond specific animal welfare campaigns. The

Netherlands is the first country to have a political party for animals – Partij voor de Dieren [Party for the Animals]¹ – represented in parliament, a feature only followed on a national level by Portugal and Australia. Organized around the belief that animals and their interests have been excluded from political process, to the detriment of animal, environmental, and human well-being, the Party for the Animals seeks to put animal rights, nature, and environmental practices on the political agenda (Partij voor de Dieren, 2020). As of 2021, the Party for the Animals holds six seats in the Dutch House of Representatives, three seats in the Dutch Senate, and one seat in the European parliament. These developments point to growing, and comparatively strong, support among Dutch voters for improving the status of animals (Thieme, 2006).

While legislative developments in the Netherlands and other countries of the Global North have garnered attention, if and how protection laws are enforced have received less scrutiny. Most countries of the Commonwealth, for example, have off-loaded responsibility to nonprofit charities, such as humane societies and SPCAs – Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Coulter and Campbell, 2020; Coulter and Fitzgerald, 2019). Countries in northern Europe, on the other hand, have been more likely to allocate governmental resources

to front-line investigations and animal protection, and to create either fully publicly funded protection infrastructure, or a hybrid model with some public funding. Developments in the Netherlands are instructive in this regard.

We do not suggest that the Netherlands has eradicated either illegal or legal animal cruelty. Rather, there are important insights for scholars, policy makers, and organizational leaders across fields to be gleaned from the Dutch case. As such, this article is not a theory-driven analysis of smaller segments of the process, nor a comparative country assessment. Instead, it presents an overview of Dutch policies and organizations involved in animal welfare and cruelty investigations.

Given the dearth of English-language scholarship on animal cruelty investigations in the Netherlands, we begin by synthesizing the most pertinent Dutch-language literature. Then we delve more deeply into the specifics of investigations and the organizational animal protection infrastructure, and how these have evolved in recent years. We conclude with a discussion of what can be learned from the national context of the Netherlands and highlight the need for stable public funding for animal-focused investigative work, the significant value of proactive inspections, and the benefits of a single national hotline for reporting animal maltreatment.

DUTCH ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON ANIMAL PROTECTION

Although there is a shortage of English-language scholarship on animal protection in the Netherlands, Dutch scholars have addressed the issue, and two dominant themes emerge. While historians and sociologists strive for a better understanding of the perceptions of animals over time and how this has shaped the position of animals in Dutch law and politics, criminologists and legal scholars focus more on animal abuse itself. The latter engage with questions regarding how to define animal abuse, what cultural implications definitions of animal abuse have, and which constituencies are detrimental when establishing what qualifies as animal abuse (see, for example, Havinga, 2008 for discussion of the politics of religiously based animal slaughter).

Most Dutch literature focusing on animal abuse addresses the relationship between animal abuse and interpersonal violence, or what is often called the human-animal violence link. Of note, Enders-Slegers, Verheggen, and Eshuis (2016) found the perpetration of animal cruelty to be more common among those who abuse their partners than among the general population. This pattern is consistent with research in other countries including

Canada, the United States, Spain, England, and elsewhere (e.g., Fitzgerald, Barrett, and Gray 2021).

Some Dutch academics have highlighted the role of veterinarians in detecting both animal and domestic abuse (e.g., Kriek & Oude Ophuis, 2014; Janssen, 2005). Enders-Slegers & Janssen (2009) found that 60% of veterinarians noticed animal abuse in their practices, and in one-third of the cases, there was a suspicion or direct evidence that other forms of violence occurred in the family, as well. Other scholars argue that veterinary forensic expertise – a field slowly gaining traction as part of animal cruelty investigations in the Netherlands – can be useful for detecting cases of animal cruelty (e.g., Huberts et al., 2019).

Another field of research examines front-line enforcement of animal cruelty laws by legal authorities. The role of the Dierenpolitie [Animal Police] has been of particular interest, and two studies provide useful background and context. Leiden and colleagues (2012) offer detailed insight on the collaboration of multiple organizations targeting animal cruelty in the Netherlands and the role that each individual organization plays. Janssen (2016) examines the establishment of the Animal Police task force and provides a critical analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of the Animal Police articulated by Dutch citizens, organizations, and politicians.

The Animal Police, however, is only one part of the grand scheme of animal cruelty investigations taking place in the Netherlands. Drawing on the academic literature available in Dutch, governmental and legal documents, information available directly from the organizations involved, and news reports, we will provide a synthesis of animal cruelty laws and the enforcement apparatus operating in the Netherlands.

THE SCOPE OF ANIMAL PROTECTION IN DUTCH LAW

The current primary animal protection law in the Netherlands came into effect in 2013 and is known as the *Wet Dieren* [Animal Law]. The Animal Law begins with the statement that the intrinsic value of animals is central to their legal construction (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, 2020)². However, despite recognition of the intrinsic value of animals, there has been no consensus established regarding the behavioural and legal consequences of such a recognition.

In addition to protection from negative actions, the Animal Law stipulates species-specific and situation-specific positive obligations. Situation-specific requirements apply, for example, to individuals who keep pets, as the

Animal Law imposes explicit rules on minimum requirements of care and housing (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, 2020). If one were to keep the same animals for production and sale, however, other regulations apply (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland). Companies that commercially keep animals such as farms are subject to additional regulations governing the animals' transportation, breeding programs, and possible slaughter (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2014).

The rules for commercially kept animals are strongly in line with European laws on animal welfare, and dictate specifics on feed, medication use (such as antibiotics), paperwork and registration, dimensions of living and transportation spaces, and more general healthcare requirements such as routine veterinary health checks and properly trained employees (Rozeboom, 2020; Rijksoverheid, 2021). Following changes made to European regulations regarding animal welfare, the Animal Law was adjusted on April 21st, 2021. These new European regulations focus on the prevention of, protection from, and response to the spread of animal diseases, and combine rules and procedures that were previously covered by a variety of sectors. Adjustments made to the Animal Law primarily include stricter requirements on animals and animal products brought into the Netherlands with the intent of reducing the risk of pathogens (Krol-Postma, 2021).

A bigger change to the Animal Law is expected to be implemented in 2023. Initiated by the Party for the

Animals, an amendment to the regulations regarding inflicting pain on animals is, at the time of writing, under discussion after having passed the House of Representatives. This amendment would drastically limit the circumstances under which pain can be inflicted, with a specific addition to the Animal Law that animals cannot be made to suffer pain merely because they are being kept in an animal husbandry facility (Krol-Postma, 2021). This addition would require animal husbandry facilities to provide spaces within which animals' can express their natural behaviour and would restrict physical alterations. For example, the dehorning of calves and goats would be banned, and swimming areas would be required for ducks.

Unsurprisingly, there are divergent perspectives on these proposed changes. Whether pets/companion animals will be included in this new amendment or if the changes only apply to commercial facilities is still being discussed ("Wijziging Wet Dieren," 2021). Moreover, the Minister of Agriculture has suggested it will be impossible for farmers to comply (Voorhorst, 2021). Who would be responsible for enforcement and what this would look like is still unknown.

ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN ANIMAL CRUELTY INVESTIGATIONS

Although smaller organizations and individuals have played and continue to play important roles in targeting and preventing animal cruelty, given space constraints, we focus on the most significant actors here (see Figure 1).

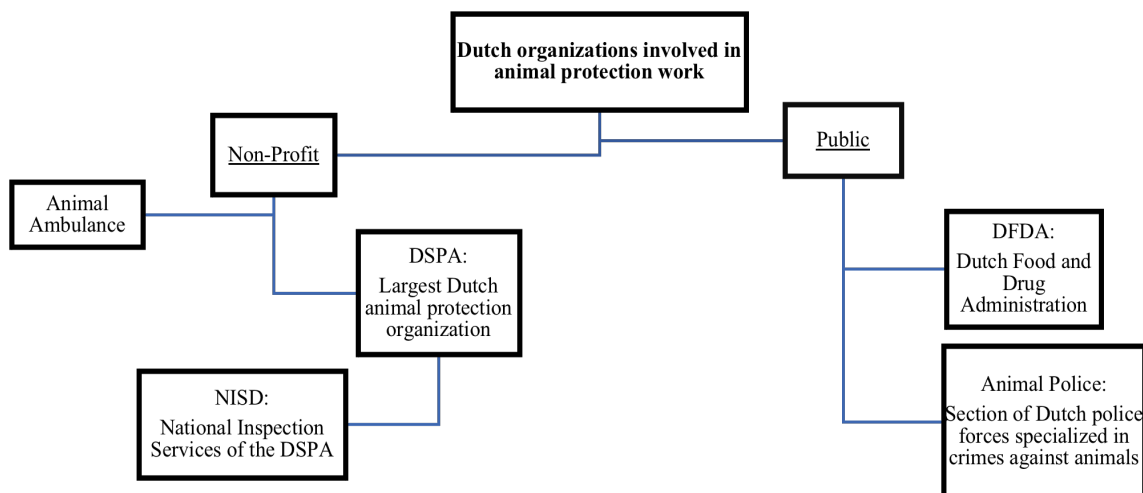


Figure 1. Overview of Dutch organizations involved in animal protection work.

Dierenbescherming

The Dierenbescherming [Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals], hereafter referred to as the DSPA, is a non-profit organization that provides medical aid, shelters stray animals, and aims to give animals a voice in society. It was founded in 1864 and was the first animal protection organization in the Netherlands. In 1875, the DSPA helped make intentional abuse of dogs and cats illegal, followed a year later by the inclusion of an article in the Dutch penal code that made abuse of all animals punishable (Dierenbescherming, 2020). As enforcement of this article by the Dutch government proved lax, the DSPA set up a rural inspectorate in 1920 using the help of so-called “veldwachters” [rural constables]³ whose small units were combined with the national Dutch police force after World War II. The rural inspectorate was active until its replacement in 1986.

Landelijke Inspectiedienst Dierenbescherming

In 1986, the Landelijke Inspectiedienst Dierenbescherming [National Inspection Services of the DSPA], hereafter referred to as the NISD, was organized by members of the DSPA who were unhappy with the Dutch government’s enforcement of animal protection provisions (Dierenbescherming, 2020). Instead of using rural constables, the NISD employs professionally trained inspectors who are authorized by the government to investigate cases of animal abuse. At the time of writing, there were 20 professionally trained inspectors working for the NISD and roughly 200 voluntary inspectors who have fulfilled minimum training requirements (Dierenbescherming, 2022). Both the professionally trained inspectors and volunteers monitor compliance, handle complaints regarding animal abuse, flag potential animal abuse cases, and execute regulated check-ups with both individuals and companies when animals are involved (G-Geschiedenis, 2014).

Although the NISD is an independent organization, its inspectors are “taking care of government tasks” (Dierenbescherming, 2020). This legally structured off-loading is reflective of the SPCA enforcement models used elsewhere in the world. NISD inspectors work for a private organization but are granted investigative powers by the Dutch government and are unionized with a subsection of the Police Union ACP. As the inspectors are granted investigative powers by the Dutch government, a public grant covers part of the costs (Dierenbescherming, 2020, 2022). Costs not covered by this grant are paid for by the DSPA (Dierenbescherming, 2020; Reijgwart, 2020).⁴

Dierenpolitie

In the early 21st century, the Dutch government increasingly recognized that more needed to be done to better regulate animal welfare and that there was significant public support for bolstering animal cruelty investigations. A survey of the general public in 2007 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality found that roughly 75% of the Dutch population believed that animal welfare is of the utmost importance and that animals in intense agricultural sectors are at risk of abuse (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2008). Given this context, in 2011 the Animal Police was created as a subsection of the Dutch police.

The idea of setting up an Animal Police force was initially articulated by the Party for the Animals. However, it was another party – the right-wing Partij Voor de Vrijheid [Party for Freedom] – that played a key role in the creation of the Animal Police. Elections had just taken place in 2010 and none of the parties received a majority vote, resulting in the need for a coalition.⁵ Although the party with the largest percentage of votes – Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie [People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy] – made an agreement with another party – Christen Democratisch Appel [Christian Democratic Appeal] – to form a coalition, together they still did not form a majority in parliament, and needed the support of a third party. The Party for Freedom eventually joined this coalition, on the condition that the coalition agreement would include stricter animal welfare regulations and establish the Animal Police (Rijksoverheid, 2010).

The Animal Police consists of officers who have completed the general two-year training for all police as well as a 10-week specialized course in animal welfare (Politie, 2020). In the latter, police officers learn about laws and regulations regarding animals in the Netherlands, how to recognize animal abuse, and how to proceed when animal abuse is reported and/or identified (Politie, 2020). Along with the establishment of the Animal Police, an enforcement alliance involving multiple organizations connected to animal welfare investigations was created. This alliance consists of the NISD, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Ministry of Justice and Safety, the Animal Police, and, as of 2012, the Dutch Food and Drug Administration [DFDA].

Although the Animal Police initially received a lot of support, including a plan to expand the taskforce to 500 fulltime police officers, in 2012 the Dutch government reduced the capacity of the Animal Police to 180 agents and adjusted their workload to cover both general and

animal welfare policing (Gaffke, 2019). One of the main critiques of this change came from members of the National Dutch Police who expressed the fear that this transformation would mean that those officers responsible for both general policing and animal protection would be unable to spend enough time on police tasks not involving animals (Rijken, 2011; AD, 2011). The chief of the National Dutch Police referred to the Animal Police dismissively as the “Guinea Pig-Police” (Dorien, 2012). Not long after the National Dutch Police made its concerns public, some politicians echoed those concerns in public debates and in the media (Benschop, 2015). Those emphasizing the need for effective frontline enforcement, however, argued that in addition to helping animal victims, animal cruelty investigations also contribute to the discovery of other crimes, particularly domestic violence. Indeed, law enforcement agencies around the world are beginning to pay more attention to animal abuse for this reason (see, for example, Coulter, 2022; Fitzgerald, Barrett, and Gray, 2020; Barrett, Fitzgerald, and Stevenson, 2017).

Another factor that contributed to the dwindling support of the Dutch government for the Animal Police was that it was established as part of larger political strategizing. An investigation by the Socialist Party suggests that the main reason the Animal Police was established was to motivate the Party for Freedom to join the political coalition, rather than an actual belief in the need for stricter animal protection enforcement (SP, 2011). Some politicians and journalists also argue that the Party for Freedom’s focus on animal welfare is primarily symbolic and designed to attract support from Dutch citizens who increasingly support more rights and protections for animals (Wanders, 2011; RNW, 2010). The coalition did not last long, and, in April 2012, new elections led to the formation of a coalition of different political parties, one which reduced the numbers and mandate of the Animal Police (NU.nl, 2012).

The Animal Police continues to operate and has slowly gained recognition for both its work and the need to enforce animal welfare laws (Gaffke, 2019). However, given the Dutch government’s decision to shrink the Animal Police’s capacity and because it is positioned as a subsection of the National Dutch Police, the Animal Police’s budget is dependent upon what the Dutch National Police allocates for this work, and that amount has been cut. This decrease has been a main point of critique for the Party for the Animals which still supports the idea of a publicly funded Animal Police.

Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit

To save costs, the multiple ministerial agencies overseeing consumer products such as food, alcohol, cosmetics, drugs safety, etc. in the Netherlands were combined in 2012 into one taskforce (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2020): The Nederlandse Voedsel en Warenautoriteit [Dutch Food and Drug Administration], hereafter referred to as the DFDA. The DFDA is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, and supervises the compliance of companies and institutions with Dutch and European law regarding food and products created in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Rather than looking at all animals, the DFDA focuses on animals kept by agricultural businesses and other companies that utilize animals and/or animal products (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit). Additionally, the DFDA covers the export and import of animals, including non-agricultural animals (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit). To monitor compliance with the law regarding animal welfare, the DFDA employs veterinarians, inspectors, and supervisors who visit companies or work sites and who can impose sanctions when there are violations of the law.

The DFDA receives €20 million annually from the Dutch government which had a total budget of €286,6 billion in 2019. The annual €20 million is supposed to be used for the protection of animal well-being and to protect food safety (Rijksoverheid 2020; Rijksoverheid, 2019). Over the period of 2014–2017, the Dutch government provided the DFDA with an additional €34 million to help with its reorganization (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2014). Businesses under the jurisdiction of the DFDA need to pay an annual contribution, which adds up to approximately €10 million extra funding annually (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal).

Dierenambulance

One final, unique component of ensuring animal well-being and welfare in the Netherlands that warrants attention here is the Dierenambulance [animal ambulance]⁶. In total there are approximately 90 organizations that use ambulances to provide first aid and/or transportation for animals, of which 42 are a member of the Federation of Dutch Animal Ambulances (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2015). These 42 member organizations together have 135 ambulances in use. Two major organizations, the DSPA and a nonprofit group called the Animal Ambulance, each have over 100 operational animal ambulances (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2015).

Except for the DSPA which receives partial governmental funding, animal ambulances are not publicly funded and are staffed by volunteers.⁷ These volunteers receive training on how to provide first aid to wounded animals, what resources are available for wounded animals, and what the laws are regarding cases of wounded or deceased animals (Dierenambulance, 2021). Ambulances are active and available 24/7, and shifts are spread among the volunteers. A limited number of fulltime, paid employees run the operational side of animal ambulances operated by the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance.

The main difference between the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance is how they can be reached. Whereas the DSPA operates with the publicly funded national animal emergency number 144, the Animal Ambulance utilizes its own national dispatch system. Although the geographic regions covered by the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance overlap, the Animal Ambulance assigns ambulances to predetermined areas, whereas the DSPA works nationally (Dierenambulance, 2019). As a result, it is possible that both the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance have ambulances operating in the same area, but it is only the DSPA that is part of the nationally run alliance and operates through the 144 number.

In both cases, once a call comes in, an ambulance is dispatched to the location. Unlike ambulances for humans, these vehicles are not equipped with sirens, and they are only allowed to turn their lights on when on scene (Dierenbescherming, 2020). This often leads to frustration for volunteers as it can cause delays in arrival time. As a result, animal organizations and politicians are pushing the government to change the rules regarding animal ambulances (Hart van Nederland, 2017).

Once on location, the volunteers assess the situation and, depending on the need, emergency medical care may be provided before the animal is taken with the ambulance. When the animal's owner/caretaker can be identified, they are given options on how to proceed. When no owner can be located or if the situation involves a liminal or wild animal, the animal is either taken to a local veterinarian or an animal shelter in the case of the DSPA, and an emergency shelter in the case of the Animal Ambulance (Dierenambulance, 2019). Animal ambulances also assist in situations where people cannot take care of their animals, such as when someone is hospitalized or evicted from their home. The ambulances can also be hired to remove dead wild animals for a fee, and in certain cases function as a paid taxi to the veterinarian. All in all, the animal ambulances provide important services for the welfare of animals.

To fund the ambulances, both the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance rely on donations and financial gifts. These funds come from organizational members who pay annual fees, through donations made by individuals or companies, and from the fees charged for certain services as outlined above. The DSPA estimates that it takes 55 euros a day to have a fully operational animal ambulance active, excluding the costs for the initial purchase of the ambulance (Dierenbescherming, 2020). While the DSPA has purchased most of its ambulances through donations, both the DSPA and the Animal Ambulance receive support from the non-profit organization Stichting Dierenlot [Foundation Dierenlot], which offers animal organizations free use of animal ambulances, financed through lobbying and fundraising activities (Stichting DierenLot, 2020).

The DSPA responded to 65000 calls in 2019, and one can imagine the significant costs that come with responding to calls about wounded animals. The Animal Law dictates that the municipality is legally obliged to cover the costs for the first 14 days of care for a wounded and/or found animal who might have a *possible owner*⁸ (Wettenbank, 2018). If an animal does not have an owner or the owner cannot be found, any costs relating to medical care, temporary shelter, or burial/cremation costs are split between donations given to the animal ambulance organization and the municipality in which the incident was reported (Dessal, 2019). If the initial 14 days pass and the animal is still in need of support or remains in the shelter to be adopted, the costs are paid by the organization that is taking care of the animal.

If the animal's owner/caretaker can be identified, they are held responsible for both the medical costs and the additional standard tariff for the animal ambulance. The DSPA, for example, charges animal owners 30 euros when the incident is within a 50 km radius of the animal ambulance station and up to 50 euros when outside this range (Dierenbescherming, 2020). If the owner cannot afford the costs, arrangements can be made whereby an organization such as the non-profit organization Quidem Carus covers part of the veterinary costs. In some cities, such as Amsterdam, residents can also receive coupons for use at the veterinarian as partial or full payment for an appointment (Hart voor Dieren, 2020).

The situation for wild animals is more complicated. The Animal Law does not require municipalities to take care of wounded wild animals; the few duties that municipalities do have come from laws regulating nature conservation and are primarily enforced by the province (van Gerwen, 2014, p.18). As a result, it is up to the

municipality to decide if wild animals within its jurisdiction will receive veterinary care or not (Smit, 2019). Leiden, a city in the south-west of the Netherlands, for example, does not allow animal ambulances to transport wounded deer or foxes. Other municipalities permit care for foxes but exclude other animals such as wounded boar (*Advies over wilde dieren*, 2021; DeStentor, 2017). The Hague, on the other hand, pays for the transportation of wounded wild animals, but does not cover costs for the care and rehabilitation processes.

THE LOGISTICS OF ANIMAL CRUELTY INVESTIGATIONS

Following the creation of the NISD (the National Inspection Services of the DSPA) in 1986, people would

contact the DSPA or NISD directly with concerns about suspected animal cruelty. With the recent creation of the Animal Police and its alliance with other organizations, a national phone number (144) was created to have one accessible central point where people can report cases of suspected animal abuse or other animal concerns. Employees working for the 144 call center are part of the National Dutch Police, and as such the number is a federal service. When a call comes in at 144, the dispatcher will forward the claim to the designated organization. This can range from the DSPA, the Animal Police, the NISD, or a local Animal Ambulance. The 144 dispatchers forward reports based on the model presented in Figure 2. This single reporting tool streamlines the process for members of the public significantly.

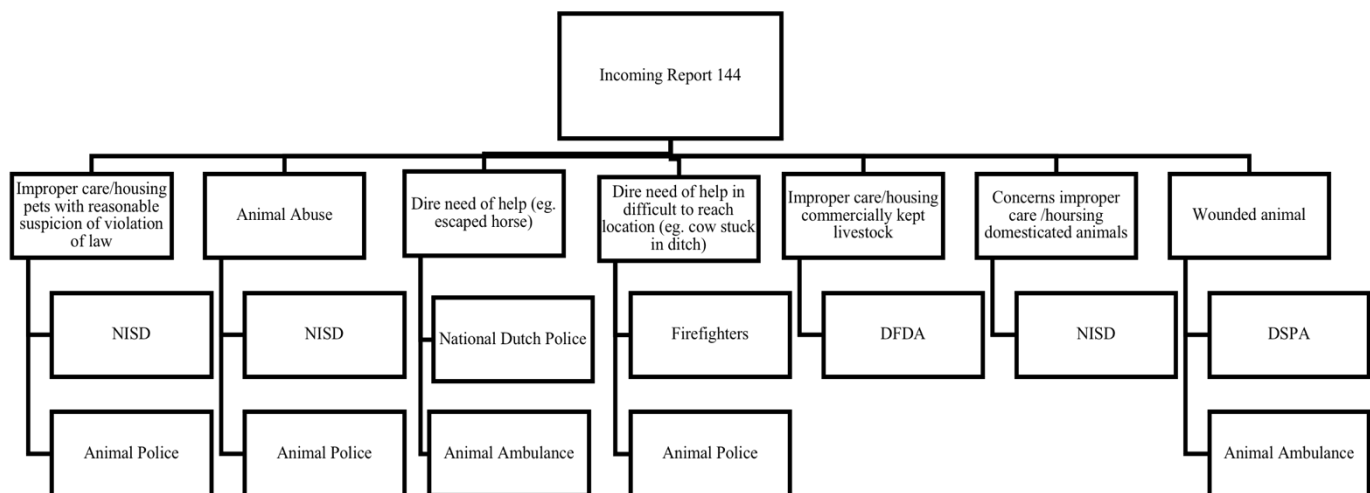


Figure 2. Response model for incoming reports through 144 regarding (suspected) animals in need (Adapted from: Dierenbescherming, 2019; Politie, 2020).

If someone suspects a case of animal neglect that needs to be investigated, they can also report it to designated confidential offices that are located throughout the Netherlands whose volunteers will forward the reports to the appropriate organization, mainly the NISD (Leiden, Hardeman, van Ham, Scholten & van Wijk, 2016). Additionally, if there are suspicions of harm done to farm animals kept as pets specifically, people can file a confidential and/or anonymous

report at local town halls that are designated by the Dutch government to deal with these suspicions (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

144: One Alliance, Split Responsibilities

All claims of suspected animal abuse reported to 144 were initially assigned to the Animal Police. However, in September 2018, the government decided to refer all non-emergency cases that involve a lack of adequate care for companion animals to the NISD. This decision was based on the rapid loss of support for the Animal Police from the Dutch government that resulted in a shortage of funding and labour power (Dierenbescherming, 2020). The NISD can request support from the Animal Police if it suspects or determines that there are violations of the law, but its officers will undertake the initial assessment. This

has made the nonprofit NISD the primary responder once again for animal calls that are not clear emergencies.

Comparing available incident report data from 2012 to 2018, it is evident that there is a significant increase in reports of animal neglect or abuse directed to the NISD instead of the Animal Police (Leiden, Hardeman, Bremmers, van Ham & van Wijk, 2012; Dierenbescherming, 2019). The number of animals reported to NISD doubled from around 3000 in 2017 to 6000 in 2019 (Leiden, Hardeman, Bremmers, van Ham & van Wijk, 2012; Dierenbescherming, 2019). This growth is correlated with a rise in incoming calls arising from the campaigns for the national emergency number 144 (Thieme, 2015). 144 receives over 10,000 calls annually and data from 2014-2015 indicate that almost one-third of these calls were individuals seeking information and/or advice on animal-related issues (Leiden, Hardeman, van Ham, Scholten & van Wijk, 2016). Only 1% of the phone calls suspected animal abuse and 12% were for alleged neglect (Leiden, Hardeman, van Ham, Scholten & van Wijk, 2016). More recent information on incidents reported through 144 is not yet available.

NISD and the Animal Police: Uniting Against Animal Cruelty

As of 2022, 20 inspectors work for the NISD, of whom 18 perform unannounced inspections and follow-up appointments, and two perform administrative work in the office in The Hague, including communicating with other organizations (Dierenbescherming, 2022). In their

daily line of work, NISD inspectors perform unannounced inspections of locations that commercially keep animals such as pet stores and dog breeders, while also responding to incoming reports of suspected abuse or neglect of both individually and commercially kept animals (Dierenbescherming, 2020). The unannounced inspections and the incoming report investigations can take place anywhere in the Netherlands and it is the responsibility of the inspectors to make sure that people comply with the Animal Law. Inspectors from the NISD often request backup from an officer of the Animal Police when they are dealing with cases in which owners are reluctant to cooperate or when initial visits show serious violations of the law (Dierenbescherming, 2020). At the time of writing, it is still unclear how the changes that to the workforce capacity of the Animal Police (being responsible for animal concerns and other issues simultaneously) have impacted its operations.

Most of the incoming reports for NISD inspectors involve cases of insufficient care. In 2019, there was a total of 5980 inspections resulting from reports made to the 144 hotline and 766 inspections that took place at the request of other organizations such as the Animal Police or the DFDA (Reijgwart, 2020). An additional 7062 administrative inspections were done by NISD inspectors and approximately 1800 inspections by volunteers. The total number of inspections undertaken by the NISD in 2019 was approximately 15,600 (Reijgwart, 2020). The outcomes of these inspections can be found in Figure 3 and warrant more analysis.

	Direct response 144	Request from other organization	Own Initiative
No action taken	2953	328	131
False Report	658	49	9
Nobody at home	1454	121	36
Transferred to other party	35	N/A	N/A
Animal voluntarily surrendered by owner	44	0	3
Oral Agreement	440	45	22
Legal Penalty	109	36	10
Administrative Penalty	287	169	30
Total	5980	766	241

Figure 3. Results of inspections conducted by NISD inspectors in 2019 by incoming source of report (data extracted from Reijgwart 2020).

General Inspections

In addition to responding to incoming reports of animal neglect and/or abuse, general inspections are undertaken proactively. However, as a result of the NISD becoming the main responder to reports from 144, there was a 54% decrease in their proactive inspection activities in 2019, down from 414 inspections in 2018 to 151 in 2019 (Reijgwart, 2020). Of the 151 inspections performed in 2019, 84 were marked as failing the inspection without a charge, 16 resulted in an administrative penalty (such as the enforcement of changes resulting in an improvement of the well-being of animals within a certain time period on the cost of the penalized), and 10 in a legal penalty (Reijgwart, 2020). Unfortunately, it is not clear from available reports what exactly the problems were, and but the minority of cases resulted in penalties.

General inspections of businesses keeping and transporting animals commercially are performed by the DFDA. These inspections differ from those performed by the NISD, as the businesses inspected are generally based in the agricultural sector. The inspections either take place daily, where there is always an inspector from the DFDA on site, or through unannounced audits (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Through these general inspections, the DFDA checks the regulatory compliance of approximately 200 slaughterhouses and 500 meat cutting plants annually (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Unannounced inspections of other businesses that keep animals commercially are determined by risk-based criteria, whereby businesses with higher-risks of violating animal well-being (such as previous offenders) are inspected more frequently (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020).

When the DFDA inspector discovers that the company is not in compliance, the company will receive a police report or penalty report, which can result in decreased financial support from the Dutch government (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Additionally, the DFDA can also act through administrative law to improve animal welfare by enforcing ultimatums, which, if not complied with, will result in harsher penalties (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Companies working with laboratory animals face additional checks as they must report annually to the DFDA regarding measures taken to reduce animal suffering which will then be assessed by the DFDA through inspections (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2020). Those working with laboratory animals must apply for a license and get approval

from the Central Committee on Animal Experimentation.

Like the NISD, the DFDA publishes the results of inspections publicly, but contrary to the NISD, these results are divided by animal species and do not provide a clear summary of the general results of inspections. There is no information available regarding what inspectors encountered at companies, at which sort of companies most violations took place, or what the cause of inspection was (proactive or reactive, what the specific details of violations are per species, etc.). The latest report available from 2018 indicates there were 2747 reports of animal illegal neglect and/or abuse, and in 38% (1044) of the cases, a violation of the law was confirmed (Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit, 2018). Most violations involved a lack of adequate care such as not providing medical care to sick animals, insufficient access to food and/or water, and/or unhygienic living conditions (Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit, 2018). Detection of these violations resulted either in administrative penalties, legal penalties, or oral agreements with scheduled follow-up inspections (Nederlandse Voedsel en Warenautoriteit, 2018). Targeted inspections of high-risk companies resulted in 145 inspections in 2018, of which 58% identified violations of the law, and in 12 cases animals were seized from the company by the DFDA (Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit, 2018).

The DFDA has faced criticism from political parties and animal protection organizations for its lack of animal welfare regulation and its toxic internal work atmosphere. Undercover investigations have revealed that animals still frequently suffer from illegal abuse, especially in slaughterhouses, and that DFDA inspectors stand by without responding (Kempkes & Strijker, 2020). Even worse, some of the DFDA veterinarians can be seen in the footage pulling animals by the tail or hitting them with a paddle (Kempkes & Strijker, 2020).

The DFDA is also criticized for its delays in publishing reports which are supposed to provide data every six months. These reports are to include the scores for slaughterhouses on hygiene and animal wellness, which received fines, how many violations occurred, and what correcting actions the DFDA has taken (Terpstra, 2021). Even when reports are published, however, critics such as *Varkens in Nood* [Pigs in Peril] suggest the data does not always properly represent what goes on within slaughterhouses (Terpstra, 2021).

Penalties and Sentences for Cases of Animal Cruelty

If an individual or company infringes upon the well-being of an animal as indicated by general and/or species-specific requirements in Dutch law, a range of measures and sanctions can be imposed on the individual or company found in violation. At the time of writing, the Ministry of Justice and Security is adjusting the Animal Law to provide judges with the ability to more quickly intervene in cases of animal abuse¹⁰ (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Details on how the Animal Law will be changed are still being discussed by Dutch parliament and will not go into effect until 2023 (Krol-Postma, 2021).

The maximum punishment for violating the Animal Law is currently three years of imprisonment and/or a fine of €19,500, with the possibility of a prohibition on animal ownership for a set amount of time (Wet Dieren). Judicial guidelines for animal abuse, however, offer significantly lower punishments than the maximum punishment available. For example, the recommended punishment for causing a minor injury to a pet/companion animal is 20 hours of community service for a first-time offender and 40 hours of community service or 20 days of unconditional imprisonment for a repeat offender (Wettenbank, 2015). The recommended punishment for causing major injury varies between 40 to 80 hours of community services or 5 weeks unconditional imprisonment, while killing someone else's animal ranges between 60 to 100 hours of community service or 2 months unconditional imprisonment (Wettenbank, 2015). Killing one's own animal(s) often results in higher punishments even though there are no specific stipulations regarding the legal consequences and the relationship of the human to the animal. (Rechtbank Oost-Brabant, 2018).

Cases of animal cruelty resulting from neglect or mistreatment are often dealt with in stages. When the incident is reported or detected by the Animal Police or NISD inspectors, the owner of the animal, whether an individual or company, is given a notice and provided with a deadline by which time the situation needs to be improved to the standards of the Animal Law. If the deadline is not met, the owner is ordered to pay a pre-established fine. If the situation is still not improved afterwards, the owner may receive additional fines, and the government can either take away the animals or improve the situation such as when an animal needs to see a veterinarian and then charge the costs to the owner (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland). If the situation is too dire, NISD inspectors and/or the Animal Police can immediately take the animal(s) away from the owner without having to provide an opportunity to improve the

situation (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland). Cases of physical injury and repeat offenders are those that receive more significant punishments (Politie, 2020).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NETHERLANDS

As this overview indicates, the animal cruelty investigations landscape in the Netherlands has strengths and weaknesses and remains uneven. With initial support from the government, the Animal Police seemed to be a strong publicly funded and accountable asset for responding to animal cruelty. Dwindling governmental support, however, makes the future of the Animal Police uncertain. With its funding embedded in police budgets, and without any specific higher-level directives, the funds are likely vulnerable, particularly given recent negative comments about animal protection by key leaders of the Dutch National Police and politicians.

At the same time, given growing and complicated international discussions about policing, racial justice, and the role of different punitive and rehabilitative strategies, particularly for nonviolent offenders (see, for example, Marceau 2019 for analysis of the US context), there are reasons to reflect further on which agencies are best positioned to take responsibility for animal protection. We also recognize what Coulter (2022) calls the animal harm spectrum and the value of having different responsive and proactive strategies depending on the particulars. While we would not suggest there is a single, one-sized fits all model, we would emphasize that positioning animal protection work within the public sector holds promise for many reasons, including the potential to utilize the sector's increased ability to properly equip, train, and protect diverse frontline workers. In the Dutch context, this might best be achieved through a dedicated, public protective service, such as an animal police that is a distinct organization with targeted public funding, to complement the existing work of the other public, animal-focused agencies, especially given high levels of support for animal protection among the country's citizens.

Nevertheless, we recognize that the Dutch case illustrates the volatility of public funding for animal-focused investigative work. Therefore, there needs to not only be public investment in addressing animal crimes, but sustained funding that entrenches animal protection as an important public safety issue, as an ethical obligation, and as an important vehicle for protecting vulnerable individuals, both animals and people. This reaffirms that when looking at animal cruelty investigations, it is important to not only consider the organizational and legal

dimensions, but also the cultural and sociopolitical context and dynamics that shape protective work.

There are also positive developments worth highlighting. The creation of the national number 144 for reporting animal maltreatment is not only helpful for facilitating and streamlining the reporting of suspected animal cruelty and creating jobs, it also assists people who simply need advice regarding their animals, thereby simultaneously playing a preventative and educational role. The education of citizens on proper animal treatment is also undertaken by animal ambulance workers. Aside from aiding animals in direct need, the animal ambulances seem to be helpful for limiting neglect and assisting those who cannot transport their animals to receive care. These are initiatives undoubtedly worth expanding globally.

Additionally, the value of proactive investigation stands out when looking at the statistics, and when thinking of the global landscape. Unannounced inspections are rarely part of the investigation toolkit, despite their effectiveness for identifying issues, as is unequivocally the case in the Netherlands. Inspections should be strengthened in the Netherlands and expanded internationally.

Notably, however, the NISD is nonprofit, and while it receives some governmental funding, the dominant pattern of assigning or simply leaving animal protection work to nonprofits, seems to be continuing in the Netherlands. The heavy reliance on volunteers staffing the ambulances and within DSPA – 200 unpaid to 20 paid workers – is of concern, and raises important questions about reliability, liability, and, most of all, safety. Front-line inspectors and responders rarely know what or who they will encounter and relying so heavily on volunteers raises concerns about whether unpaid workers are sufficiently trained, equipped, and resourced.

Finally, it is also worth noting the cross-section of responsive strategies, ranging from educative and corrective actions, to fines and community services, to more serious options such as incarceration for serious offenses. Given that animal abuse cases exist on a spectrum, of which a high number are passive neglect rather than willful abuse (see also Coulter, 2019, 2022), having a cross-section of enforcement and other responsive tools allows front-line workers to more effectively adapt to the specifics of what they find in the field.

The progressive changes in the Netherlands are especially interesting because of the political setting in which they are taking place. Being the first country with a political party for animal rights represented in parliament, it is noteworthy that support for the creation of the Animal Police came primarily from right wing politicians, as

this has traditionally been more of a concern of the political left. It needs to be said, however, that for some this support may be motivated, at least partially, by specific concerns about forms of animal (ab)use perpetrated by marginalized groups of people—concerns connected to xenophobia and racism—instead of reflexively attending to more widespread types of animal maltreatment. Although playing a key role in the creation of the Animal Police, the right-wing PVV, for example, only mentions animals once in its party platform. In contrast, the Party for the Animals is making progress in the Netherlands, growing steadily in voter support each election, and promoting important animal welfare policies at local and national levels (Partij voor de Dieren, 2022).

Future work of value would delve more deeply into the statistics, examine the impact the developments in the Netherlands have had on other European countries, and consider how the Dutch context evolves. At the time of writing, for instance, there are public calls for the creation of an animal protection force in Belgium akin to the Dutch Animal Police. Dutch initiatives may spark broader developments in animal cruelty legislation and enforcement by EU member countries and beyond. Additionally, it is critical to look at the success rate of the multiple animal cruelty investigation practices discussed in this article over time. How to define success in animal protection responses and cruelty prevention is an ongoing and important sociolegal and organizational question (Coulter 2022). Overall, the Dutch context and efforts offer valuable insights for those committed to the real work of protecting animals, not only in theory, but also in practice.

NOTES

¹ Throughout the article, translations of Dutch organizations and political parties will be provided once, but to avoid confusion, the English name will be used thereafter.

² Based on the notion of intrinsic value, The Animal Law states that infringement upon the well-being of animals must be avoided, and reasonable care must be provided. The list of wrongdoings consistent with the Five Freedoms in other jurisdictions is delineated.

³ The enforcement powers of the rural constables were limited to handing out fines or reprimanding those caught breaking the law.

⁴ NAPIS presents financial statements in annual reports which are accessible to the public (Reijgwart, 2020).

⁵ More information on the political system in the Netherlands can be found in the section Partij voor de Dieren – Animals in Dutch Politics.

⁶. Because the organization has the same name as the vehicle, references to the organization will always be in capital letters.

⁷. Volunteers working on animal ambulances also fulfill educational roles, take care of animals at shelters, take calls at the dispatch center, undertake some financial administration, coordinate between the ambulances and municipalities and sometimes operate the animal ambulance as an animal taxi – driving animals to vets for a set fee.

⁸. As there is no clarity in The Animal Law on the distinction of ownership of wild and domesticated animals (assumptions are made based on species whether an animal is wild or domesticated), many municipalities argue that they do not need to cover the costs for “wild” animals as they can be categorized as nature, which removes the duties of the municipalities according to the Animal Law.

⁹. NAPIS temporarily removed 134 animals from their owner with the possibility of being returned if the owner improves the situation, and 163 animals were removed without the possibility of return (Reijgwart, 2020).

¹⁰. There is no clear information as to what this would look like, but one method discussed is clarifying some of the terminology and boundaries of sections of the current Animal Law (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2020).

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