

IFSS ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE



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INTRODUCTION

In december 2017, the IFSS board asked Prof Dominique Grandjean (France) to set up an « Animal Welfare Committee » for IFSS and regroup knowledgeable people to work on the subject. End of January 2018, the proposal of an “Animal Health and Welfare Committee” was validated by IFSS board of directors.

The goals of this committee will be to :

- ◇ Define the best practices regarding health and welfare management of racing sled dogs
- ◇ Write and propose to IFSS board of directors a « IFSS guide for good practices »
- ◇ Propose eventual racing rules evolutions to IFSS race committee and anti-doping committee
- ◇ Evaluate the risks of « conflicts of interests » that might occur between the populations involved, one way or another, within the sled dog sport
- ◇ Develop dedicated scientific research actions in order to improve all the components of the dogs welfare and welfare perception by the public

MEMBERS OF THE IFSS AHWC

✓ Chairman :

- Prof Dominique Grandjean (France)

✓ Members :

- Prof Mila Benito (Spain).
- Dr Delphine Clero (France)
- Dr Anette Johansson (Sweden)
- Dr Annette Kriller (Germany)
- Dr Jerry Vanek (USA)
- Dr Ingrid Wiik Haugbjork (Norway)

✓ The IFSS HAWC has a group email adress : welfare-committee@sleddogsport.net

ANIMAL WELFARE TODAY AND COMMENTS

Our sport is characterized by a large amount of disciplines, involving a hudge variability in health and welfare impact these activities may have on dogs. From canicross dogs, running not more than 7km in dryland conditions, to long distance dogs performing up to nearly 200km per day during several

successive days in snowland conditions, consequences on health and welfare, and moreover welfare perception by non-specialized people, cannot be equal.

1. We know what “Health” means, but what is “Welfare” ?

“Fit for function; fit for life” (Kennel club)

Both psychological and physical compounds are included in the word “welfare”. It includes not only the dog assessment, but also the special link that exists between the musher and his dog(s). And it also involves the way different groups of people will react to what they see/feel: mushers, organizers, veterinarians, judges, sponsors, medias, spectators, animal activists...

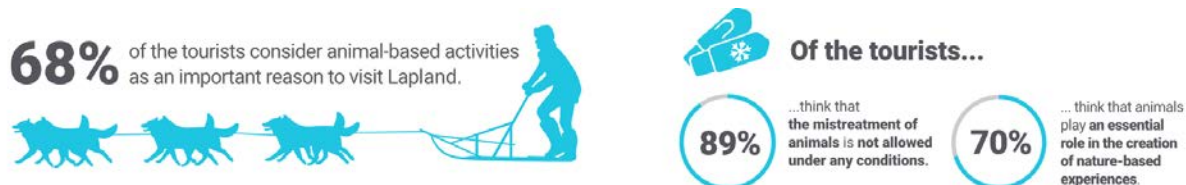
Welfare notion was first based on the ‘Five Freedoms’ concept, a method of animal welfare assessment where an animal is in an environment that allows him to be (Brambell, 1965):

- Free from hunger and thirst
- Free from discomfort
- Free from pain, injuries, and disease
- Free to express normal behavior
- Free from fear and distress

Broom (1986) gives a definition of welfare as: “animal’s state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment”. This includes positive and negative aspects of coping systems like feelings and other high- level brain functions, as well as other mechanisms dealing with homeostatic displacements.

A holistic approach to animal welfare now exists, with an inter-disciplinary approach including animal physiology, behavior, affective states, husbandry, nutrition, transport, housing, social life, enrichment efficacy, animal training, and human-animal relationships. This is definitely the good way to work. Animal welfare scientists now advocate animal-based measures and place less emphasis on animal resources; for example, Fraser (1997) emphasizes the importance of accommodating animal’s natural adaptations and capabilities, and striving for good health, minimizing negative affective states such as fear and pain, and promoting experiences of pleasures.

We must distinguish welfare assessment in the different circumstances sport dogs meet: during daily conditioning and more globally at home, and in races. The one we must first focus on is the welfare during races, even if there will necessarily come a day where what happens in kennels will have to be checked.



The very recent survey conducted by the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi (Finland) on the sled dogs tourism business clearly demonstrates how important is the notion of welfare for the public, and we must keep in mind that most of the people do not have a real dog “education”. This has to be taken into account in our vision of racing dogs welfare, and we do need to spend time and efforts on both populations, competitors AND public.

2. How to assess dog welfare?

2.1. Physical welfare

- Age at the beginning of training:

It is widely required to wait till the end of the growth period before training a puppy for any kind of sport. However, no precise data exist on what can be done at which age. A certain amount of preconditioning can be done before the end of the growth if adequate rest and endurance training are avoided, and if the mental of the puppy is preserved by using games and not forcing the animal by any manner.

For sprint races, 12 months old is actually considered old enough to take part to races. It is probably hard to have a fit and performant dog at 12 months of age if the conditioning and the physical training starts theoretically when growth is over... 15 months of age would be a better age to begin sprint races if we don't want to push the dog too early during physical conditioning. Canicross might be an exception as most dog are limited by their driver's performance, and distance are not so long and therefor this category could stay with a minimum limit of 12 months for competitions.

- Nutritional status:

Ideal body condition score for sled dog is 4 on a 9 points scale (Wakshlag, 2014). A body condition score strictly below 3 should be a "non starting" condition whatever the type of race is. Especially in long distance races, during which energy requirements related to sport are increased by environmental challenge, BCS at start should be around 5, but a dog under 3 on a 9 points scale must not leave the checkpoint. If he is equal to 3, he can only leave the checkpoint only after appropriate feeding.

Feeding: a change in appetite habit is a sign of misbalance between stimulus and dog adaptation. It is so important to monitor appetite in dogs: no meal for more than one day will result in a decreased weight and may lead to a low body condition score. Appetite loss is a frequent condition in long distance sled dogs. However, no dog should leave a check point without appropriate feeding. Then the quality of the food and its dedicated balance regarding the type of dog/effort involved must be checked.

Drink: hydration is a main point to reduce the risk of metabolic problems during resting. If on the stake out a sufficient amount of water is easy to guarantee, but on mid or long distance trails, and even sometimes on other types of races, it too often appears as an underestimated aspect. We should probably have at least one stop point where dogs can drink every hour on mid-distance races, and in the middle of the race on shorter events. Discussion should at least be opened on that aspect.

- Appropriate conditioning:

It is part of welfare to have dogs enough prepared and especially not overtrained for important events. This part of the evaluation is however hard to test on the field.

- Adequate resting period:

We do miss scientific data attesting of the daily sleep requirements for dogs, and this concerns long distance races where few resting periods are actually mandatory. The dog is a natural "sleeper" and one can wonder how an 8 hours rest period on a 300 to 600km may be enough to ensure welfare. This is another discussion that must be opened, and it probably requires to run dedicated research on the subject.

46. Distance races

- 46.1. If weather conditions, in the opinion of the RM or the organizer, dictate that the race cannot be run according to the basic criteria for the sport, the race may be postponed. If conditions as mentioned occur after the start, the race may be temporarily “frozen”. This shall be done at a check-point or ahead of the location of the first driver. All drivers shall be held back for an identical period of time.
- 46.2. The organizer and the RM shall, without unnecessary delay, inform all drivers of decisions, and reason for same, made according to § [46.1](#).
- 46.3. Mandatory stops
 - 46.3.1. Races with a total distance of 300 to 600 km shall at least have a total of 8 hrs mandatory rests, to be distributed at the local organizer’s discretion.
 - 46.3.2. Races with a total distance of more than 600 km shall at least have a total of 12 hrs mandatory rests, to be distributed at the local organizer’s discretion.

The problem becomes worse when camping out of checkpoint is allowed, resting periods are out of the control of officials, especially veterinarians. It may be a good think to have at least a 30 minutes mandatory stop on each checkpoint to allow an efficient vetcheck on dogs.

2.2. Psychological welfare

- Dog behavior’s markers

Happy dogs mean dogs having a positive attitude, and felt this way by people. To ensure dog’s welfare, the attitude of the musher toward his dog may be evaluated to. The dog should not have signs of fear (low tail and ears, reluctant to his owner contact, refusing to get out of his box) at any time. A decrease in appetite is often a sign of stress. However, it is frequent in races especially when the dog is not familiar with the stake out environment. He must however look happy (tail wagging and will to go) as soon as he sees his harness out.

- In long distance checkpoint should be organized in order to minimize dog’s stress.

It has to be written in every long distance race rules that the dogs must leave a checkpoint willingly, by themselves, without being dragged by a handler, an official or the musher himself. The handler can be here to help the drivability of the team, but should never pull the team.

2.3. Race design and environment

- Length of trails:

Our rules put minimal and maximum distance for specific categories. However, an increased demand regarding longer distances come from a high number of people training and practicing “trail” with their dogs. This kind of distance may not impact negatively on welfare if it is well controlled by organizers and the veterinarians on site (the vet should be mandatory on site if the distance exceed 10km/ day and per dog).

47.2.1. **Minimum and recommended distances:**

Unlimited Class: 20 km (12.5 miles). Recommendation: 20 km (12.5 miles) up to the last full weekend in January, and 24 km (15 miles) thereafter.

Eight/Ten-Dog Class: 14 km (9 miles). Recommendation: 14 km (9 miles) up to the last full weekend in January and 16 km (10 miles) thereafter.

Six-Dog Class: 9 km (6 miles). Recommendation: 9 km (6 miles) up to the last full weekend in January and 12 km (7.5 miles) thereafter.

Four-Dog Class: 6 km (4 miles). Recommendation: 6 km (4 miles) up to the last full weekend in January and 8 km (5 miles) thereafter.

Two-dog Class: 5 km (3.2 miles).

Ski-Dogs: 5 to 25 km (3.1 to 15.6 miles) for the women and 10 to 30 km (6.2 to 18 miles) for the men.

47.2.2. **Special circumstances:**

If special circumstances dictate that the length of the trail be decreased or increased, the decrease or increase shall never be more than 25% in any class.

48. **Distance Races**

For all classes:

Mid-Distance: Between 80 and 250 km (50 and 156 miles) with, in principle, an average of at least 40 km (25 miles)/stage for multi-stage races.

Long-Distance: More than 250 km (156 miles) with, in principle, an average of at least 80 km (50 miles)/stage for multi-stage races.

49. **Dryland races: Distances (per heat or stage)**

| | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 49.1. | Canicross elite and veterans: | minimum of 2 km, | maximum 8 km | (1.2 to 5 miles) |
| 49.2. | Canicross juniors: | minimum of 1 km, | maximum 4 km | (0.6 to 2.5 miles) |
| 49.3. | Relay (each leg): | minimum of 0.5 km, | maximum 4 km | (0.3 to 2.5 miles) |
| 49.4. | 1-dog Bikejoring class: | minimum of 2 km, | maximum of 10 km | (1.2 to 6.2 miles) |
| 49.5. | 1-dog Scooter class: | minimum of 2 km, | maximum of 8 km | (1.2 to 5 miles) |
| 49.6. | 2-dog Scooter class: | minimum of 2 km, | maximum of 8 km | (1.2 to 5 miles) |
| 49.7. | 4-dog Rig class: | minimum of 4 km, | maximum of 8 km | (2.5 to 5 miles) |
| 49.8. | 6-dog Rig class: | minimum of 5 km, | maximum of 10 km | (3.1 to 6.2 miles) |
| 49.9. | 8-dog Rig class: | minimum of 5 km, | maximum of 12 km | (3.1 to 7.5 miles) |

- Temperature:

There are more and more questions concerning the “acceptable or unacceptable” temperatures to let a dog run, especially for dryland races in spring or summer. In our rules, we provide strict guidelines regarding what can be done or not in term of environmental temperatures. There is however nearly nothing regarding cold environment, and one can wonder why having so few guidelines regarding this specific condition, even if we talk about “sled dogs”.

B . III Temperatures at Dryland races – Guidelines

21. At dryland races there shall be a thermometer and a hygrometer in the starting area. They shall be readily visible, placed in the shade, at 50 centimeters (20 inches) above ground level.
22. The minimum and maximum temperatures and humidity shall be noted during the entire race.
23. Given the minimum and maximum, trail conditions and local circumstances (e.g. humidity), the following guidelines are available for decisions to be taken by the race giving organization and the Race Marshal for the well-being of the dogs:
 - 23.1. Temperatures below 18°C for Canicross and 16°C for all other classes and with a humidity below 85 %: normal competition

 Temperatures above 16°C, but below 18°C: the distances shall not exceed the minimums given in D.II §49. This maximum temperature is set at 22°C for Bikejoring classes and at 25°C for Canicross classes.

 Temperatures above 18°C, but below 22°C: the distance shall not exceed 1.5 kilometers for demonstration purpose only except for Bikejoring and Canicross (see DII §49).

 Temperatures above 22°C: no team shall be harnessed except for Canicross (see DII §49).
 - 23.2. If the temperature reaches 18°C, the Race Marshal shall call a meeting with the race veterinarian(s) in order to decide upon whether the race shall be delayed or cancelled. The veterinarian's opinion shall be preponderant in case of different opinions. Animal welfare shall always be the major deciding factor.
 - 23.3. Depending on the race trail (i.e. large section under the sun) or other facts, the Race Marshal may impose shorter distances or other measures if this is favouring the sport, even if the maximum temperatures above are not reached.

B . IV Extreme low Temperatures at snow races – Guidelines

24. In the event of extreme low temperatures, the jury together with the Organizing Committee and the team leaders shall decide if the race should be cancelled, have a delay on the starting time, or reduce the race distance. Any National Federation standards must be considered in making the final decision.

3. Practical implications

3.1. Events organization

Events should be organized in order to emphasize dog welfare, with special attention to climate conditions, quality of the trails, interactions of medias and spectators with dogs at the stake-out, music and noises, including those from groups of mushers having a couple of drinks at night close to dogs' resting places...

3.2. Rules

On mid and long distance races, including stage races, an individual recording booklet should be mandatory for each dog, with dogs' individual data recorded. And like for endurance horse racing, mandatory resting period post-race should be enforced by using these booklets; This is a mandatory tool for every single service working dog...and for all endurance racing horses that could be adapted to racing sled dogs.

Art 5.3 – Mise au repos des poneys/chevaux

Après chaque course, le cheval doit avoir une période de mise au repos obligatoire avant de pouvoir être réengagé. Cette période de repos est calculée en fonction du nombre de kilomètres parcourus. Elle débute à minuit le soir suivant l'arrivée de la course et se termine à minuit le dernier jour de la période de repos :

| DISTANCE PARCOURUE | TEMPS DE REPOS MINIMUM | 1ERE ELIMINATION BOITERIE | 2EME ELIMINATION BOITERIE CONSECUTIVE DANS LES 12 MOIS | 3EME ELIMINATION BOITERIE CONSECUTIVE DANS LES 12 MOIS SUIVANT LA 1ERE ELIMINATION |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Contrôle initial | | 14 jours | 21 jours | 90 jours |
| Départ à 46 km | 5 jours | 5+14 = 19 jours | 5+21= 26 jours | 5+90 = 95 jours |
| Plus de 46 à 86 km | 12 jours | 12+14 = 26 jours | 12+21= 33 jours | 12+90 = 102 jours |
| Plus de 86 à 126 km | 19 jours | 19+14 = 33 jours | 19+21 = 40 jours | 19+90 = 109 jours |
| Plus de 126 à 146 km | 26 jours | 26+14 = 40 jours | 26+21 = 47 jours | 26+90 = 116 jours |
| Plus de 146 km | 33 jours | 33+14 = 47 jours | 33+21 = 54 jours | 33+90 = 123 jours |

Si un cheval/poney est éliminé pour raisons métaboliques ayant requis un traitement invasif immédiat par le vétérinaire, il doit avoir une mise au repos obligatoire avant de pouvoir être réengagé :

- ◆ 1^{er} incident : 60 jours de repos
- ◆ 2^{ème} incident dans les 12 mois : 90 jours de repos

3.3. Education

Education is a major way to improve welfare. A collaboration with ISDVMA, ACVSMR, ECVSMR and veterinary universities having K9 sport medicine units may help to produce data available for mushers and running dog lovers, in order to improve knowledge on dog's requirements. It can be done through books, website information, web conferences, conferences... Edited or organized by the IFSS. The goal can be to do at least one conference every two years on sled dogs, and two web conferences per year.

3.4. Research

Some questions stay without response because of the lack of knowledge and scientific evidence:

- Training methods
- Effects of sleep deprivation
- Impact of racing stress on immunity
- Global welfare biological markers

The future should allow veterinarians to provide answers that would help IFSS to move forward on the question of welfare.

CONCLUSION

The present text is actually just a global introduction to what could/should be done within IFSS in order to cope with the actuals important movements in the public concerning animal welfare. Recent events, concerning especially doping problems in a major race, clearly show how harmful for the sport certain situations and writings can be. One must keep in mind that today information is spread worldwide in a few hours...The IFSS AHWC will act as a task force proposing options and/or changes to IFSS board of directors, and would like the sled dog world to act the fact that in any situation the musher is responsible for what happens to his dogs, except in a very limited number of situations !