

*These notes refer to the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (c.16) which received Royal Assent on 29 March 2011*

# Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES**

3. The Act supersedes the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (hereafter referred to as “the 1972 Act”). The Act updates and strengthens powers in the 1972 Act that existed to promote the welfare of vertebrate animals. The Act aligns welfare standards for farmed animals, which have generally been kept in line with developments in scientific understanding, and non-farmed animals which are largely protected by laws formulated almost forty years ago. It introduces an offence for the failure to take reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals for which a person is responsible, prohibits the docking of dogs’ tails subject to certain conditional exemptions for certified working dogs involved in law enforcement, lawful pest control or lawful shooting of animals, prohibits the transfer of animals by way of sale or prize to persons under 16, specifies that abandonment is an offence whether an animal is likely to suffer or not and strengthens the provisions relating to animal fights. It also provides that an inspector or constable may take into their possession an animal which is suffering or likely to suffer, that a person can be deprived of possession or ownership of an animal on conviction for certain specified offences and that a person can be disqualified from participating in animal-related activities following conviction for certain offences. The Act clarifies the enforcement roles of DARD inspectors and council inspectors and a definition of farmed animals is included for clarity. Provision has been made to enable regulations to be made to amend the definition of “animal” or to extend the application of the Act to animals in foetal or embryonic form, ensuring the welfare of animals, requiring certain animal activities to be licensed or registered, prohibiting the keeping of certain animals and extending the provision enabling the detention of vessels so that it includes aircraft and hovercraft.