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DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL TRAP STANDARDS -- A PROGRESS REPORT

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ABSTRACT: ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, formed a technical committee in 1987 to develop an international standard for humane traps. This effort began with the establishment of international Working Groups charged with preparing standards for killing and restraining traps. Capture efficiency, humaneness, injury thresholds, selectivity, testing, and safety are addressed in the standards. A final draft standard could be voted on by ISO member countries by mid-1995.

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INTRODUCTION

Animals are trapped in most countries for a variety of reasons including the production of food or fur, to control predators or pests, to ensure survival of the species in wildlife conservation programs, or for research. Currently, there is no international standard that countries may turn to for criteria that can be used to evaluate the performance of traps. This means that a whole range of trap types and designs are in use. Even when legislation exists in individual countries banning particular traps, the specification of what is "inhumane" and what is not varies from country to country.

Opposition to the use of traps has increased in recent years due to public concern that certain types of traps cause "unacceptable" injuries or "suffering" to trapped animals. Controversy over this issue heightened in Canada and other countries during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973 the Canadian government established a Federal/Provincial Committee for Humane Trapping to determine the most humane trapping methods for some 19 fur-bearing species. Subsequently, in 1983, Canada initiated a more extensive research program toward the development of humane killing traps.

Also, Canada proposed that an international effort be initiated in an attempt to achieve global consensus on acceptable methods of trapping. Interest in developing an international standard defining humane animal traps was first expressed at the 1983 Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Gambia. Initially, little interest was expressed by ISO member countries. However, through continuing initiatives by Canada and agreement from six other national standards agencies, ISO, in 1986, established Technical Committee 191 (ISO TC 191) with a mandate to develop international standards for humane traps. Those countries responded to the invitation to participate in the work by nominating a delegation of experts and the first meeting was held in March 1987. The Secretariat for the TC 191 is held by the Standards Council of Canada and Mr. N. Jotham was nominated and subsequently appointed by ISO as its Chairman.

ISO is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies from more than 90 countries headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Its mission is to promote the of standardization and related activities in the world with a view to facilitating the international exchange of goods and services, and to developing cooperation in a sphere of intellectual, scientific, technical, and economic activity. The scope of ISO covers all fields except electrical and electrical engineering standards.

The objective of an international standard is to define clear and unambiguous provisions in order to facilitate international trade and communication. To achieve this objective, the international standard shall: 1) be as complete as necessary within the limits specified by its scope; 2) be consistent, clear, and accurate; 3) take full account of the state of the art; 4) provide a framework for future technological development; and 5) be comprehensible to qualified persons who have not participated in its preparation.

ORGANIZATION OF TC 191

Membership in ISO TC 191 was based on participation and interest in the standards-setting process. Countries that actively take part in this process are granted participating or "P" status. Other countries which are interested in the process, but not actively involved, are designated as observer or "O" status. The status of individual countries changed somewhat as the process continued. By 1986, seven countries which included Canada, United States (U.S.), Australia, (later moving to "O" status), Sweden, Argentina, Germany, and Finland were designated as "P" members. New Zealand, Belgium, United Kingdom (UK), Netherlands, Denmark, France (initially "O" status), and the Russian Federation were later granted "P" status as the process continued. Each P-member country has voting privileges at all plenary sessions of the TC 191. Also, ISO designated 10 countries as "O" members, including Australia (earlier "P" status), Austria, China, France and Russia (both moved to "P" status), Hungary, India, Italy, Kenya, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey. These countries are allowed to comment on the standards, but have no voting privileges within TC 191 on the language of the standard. In addition to the standards organizations, ISO granted category "A" liaison participation to national groups having an interest in the subject; i.e., the Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, the Federation of Field Sports for the

European Community, and the European Federation for Nature and Animals. Category "B" liaison status was granted to the European Commission.

The work of TC 191 began in 1987 with the establishment of three Working Groups identified as WG1 (Terminology), WG2 (killing traps), and WG3 (restraining traps). The primary function of the Working Groups was to draft standards for each of the trap categories. WG1 completed its work in the first year and was assimilated into the other working groups. WG2 was chaired by Dr. Jan Jofriet, Professor, School of Engineering, University of Guelph (Canada), and was composed of 12 experts nominated by the U.S., Canada, Germany, U.K., Sweden, and New Zealand. WG3 was chaired by Dr. Fred Gilbert, Professor, Department of Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University (U.S.), and composed of 17 experts nominated by the U.S., Canada, U.K., Sweden, and New Zealand. Individuals on the Working Groups represented academia, state and federal wildlife management agencies, trapper organizations, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, and trap manufacturers.

While draft trap standards were being developed over the seven-year period, they were periodically reviewed by national advisory groups within each of the participating countries. In the U.S., the advisory group is referred to as a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and is administered by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), while in Canada it is under the Standards Council of Canada (SCC), and similarly by the national standards agency in each "P" member of ISO TC 191. These advisory groups include representatives from interests similar to the Working Groups, but have the responsibility to develop positions regarding the standard that represents the interests of a specific country.

PROGRESS ON DEVELOPING STANDARDS

Since the trap standards process began in 1987, there have been numerous meetings of the Working Groups and the National Advisory Committees. Also, there have been four plenary sessions of TC 191. The end result of these meetings has been the production of a Committee Draft Standard composed of three parts which included: 1) mechanically powered, trigger activated killing traps; 2) restraining traps; and 3) submersion killing systems. In general, the standards could cover all of the devices commonly used for capturing mammals (from mice to elephants) throughout the world.

The standards have key components which include scope, definitions, general requirements, detailed requirements, and testing. Within these components such topics as capture efficiency, times to irreversible unconsciousness, injury thresholds, selectivity, and safety are covered.

TC 191 has taken account of research, testing, and development towards more humane trapping systems in Canada, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, and the U.S. The committee itself has initiated some testing. All testing involving live animals has been carried out in accordance with the veterinary codes of the countries concerned, or with national guidelines on the use of laboratory animals.

Since TC 191 is dealing with practical realities, its approach to defining "humaneness" is closely related to the dictionary definition of "inflicting a minimum of pain" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, 7th edition, p. 485). Part of the committee's work consists of assigning values to this minimum. In the case of killing traps, the value is the time taken before the animal lapses irreversibly into unconsciousness. In the case of restraining traps, the value is of a threshold of injury, beyond which the trap would be judged as unacceptable. The establishment of these values is achieved by discussion among the national delegations on the committee until a consensus agreement is reached.

In February 1994, the fourth plenary meeting of TC 191 was held in Ottawa, Canada. The objective of the meeting was to achieve consensus agreement on the draft documents that were produced by the Working Groups. A major topic of discussion at the meeting was whether the word "humane" should remain in the title. Following extensive discussion, it was decided that the word "humane" would be removed from the title of the standard. A new working title now reads, "Animal (mammal) traps." However, a preamble will be included in the standard as follows: "The purposes of this standard are to consider performance criteria for humaneness; to encourage the ongoing development of humane traps and hence to improve the welfare of animals caught in traps, including reducing injuries to, and minimizing suffering of animals; to improve capture efficiency, selectivity and user safety." It was further decided to include a system of performance categories in the standard that would not be prejudiced in their value with respect to "humaneness." Consequently, the committee decided to establish a single working group to further develop the performance requirements of the different parts of the standard taking into account the decisions relating to the majority and consensus views of the meeting. The "P" member countries and Category "A" liaison members were encouraged to nominate their experts to the new Working Group as soon as possible.

Following completion of the new Working Group's work, a fourth Committee draft, is expected to be circulated for a vote among ISO TC 191 "P" members. Should the results of that vote be positive, it is anticipated that the document will be circulated as a draft in the fall of 1994. If 75% of the voting member countries cast an affirmative vote, then an ISO international standard could be approved by mid-1995.

It should be recognized that ISO standards are not permanent, but are meant to reflect "state of the art." The standards are periodically reviewed (at least every five years) in relation to technological developments and changing requirements. The technical committee responsible for a particular standard conducts a review in order to decide whether it should be confirmed, revised, or withdrawn. This review procedure ensures that ISO standards continue to reflect the current state of the art. Also, ISO, as an organization for the development of technical standards, has no mandate to intervene in the ethical debate on trapping per se. Decisions to ban activities like trapping--whether to control pests or to harvest furs from fur-bearing animals--are made by governments.

As a non-government body, ISO has no power to enforce adoption and implementation of the international standards it develops and approves. It will be up to the legislative bodies of individual states or countries to decide if they want to adopt international trap standards. The standard on humane traps will therefore be for voluntary application. However, the very existence of an international standard on animal traps should result in increased emphasis on more humane traps. The standard will act as an incentive for trap manufacturers and will provide a guideline for users to evaluate traps.