



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **UFAW FUNDS RESEARCH INTO UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING CATTLE WELFARE IN INDIA**

## **Charity supports India's first-ever welfare assessment of cow shelters**

UFAW, the international charity which uses science in the service of animal welfare, has recently supported a project that will investigate the welfare of cattle in gaushalas in India.

India presents a unique scenario that is not seen anywhere else in the world. As a largely Hindu country, there are legal and religious restrictions on the slaughter of cattle and therefore there is a large population of stray cattle. There are over 4000 cattle shelters (called gaushalas) which attempt to care for them, and they are believed to house up to a million animals.

The project, "Gaushalas in India: Contemporary Issues and Future Perspectives" is being carried out by veterinarian Dr Arvind Sharma and colleagues from the University of Queensland under the supervision of Professor Clive Phillips. It will develop measures of welfare of cattle in shelters which will then be used to create an assessment tool for veterinarians, shelter operators and government regulators.

UFAW's CEO Dr Robert Hubrecht said: "The pressure on gaushalas is intense – there are over 5.2 million stray cows in India. By providing funding to support this project, a clearer picture of the welfare of cattle in these shelters will become evident. The development of a protocol to assess the welfare of these animals in a systematic and scientific manner will provide a tool for managers and external assessors to improve cattle welfare."

Dr Sharma's study will take an estimated three years to complete and involve 4 states of India. The project will use various parameters such as water, housing, flooring and ventilation and animal-based indicators like body condition, cleanliness and hock lesions to gauge the welfare of cattle in shelters. Stress levels of cows will also be measured via analysis of their tail hairs for cortisol levels.



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Surveys of nearly 1,000 shelter managers and community members living in the area to ascertain their attitudes and beliefs towards sheltering of unproductive cows as opposed to slaughter will also be conducted.

Dr Sharma concluded: "With this study, we will set welfare benchmarks, ensure long-term sustainability, and find a balance between tradition and welfare science."

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### **Note to editors:**

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

This work relies on the support of members, subscribers and donors.

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE