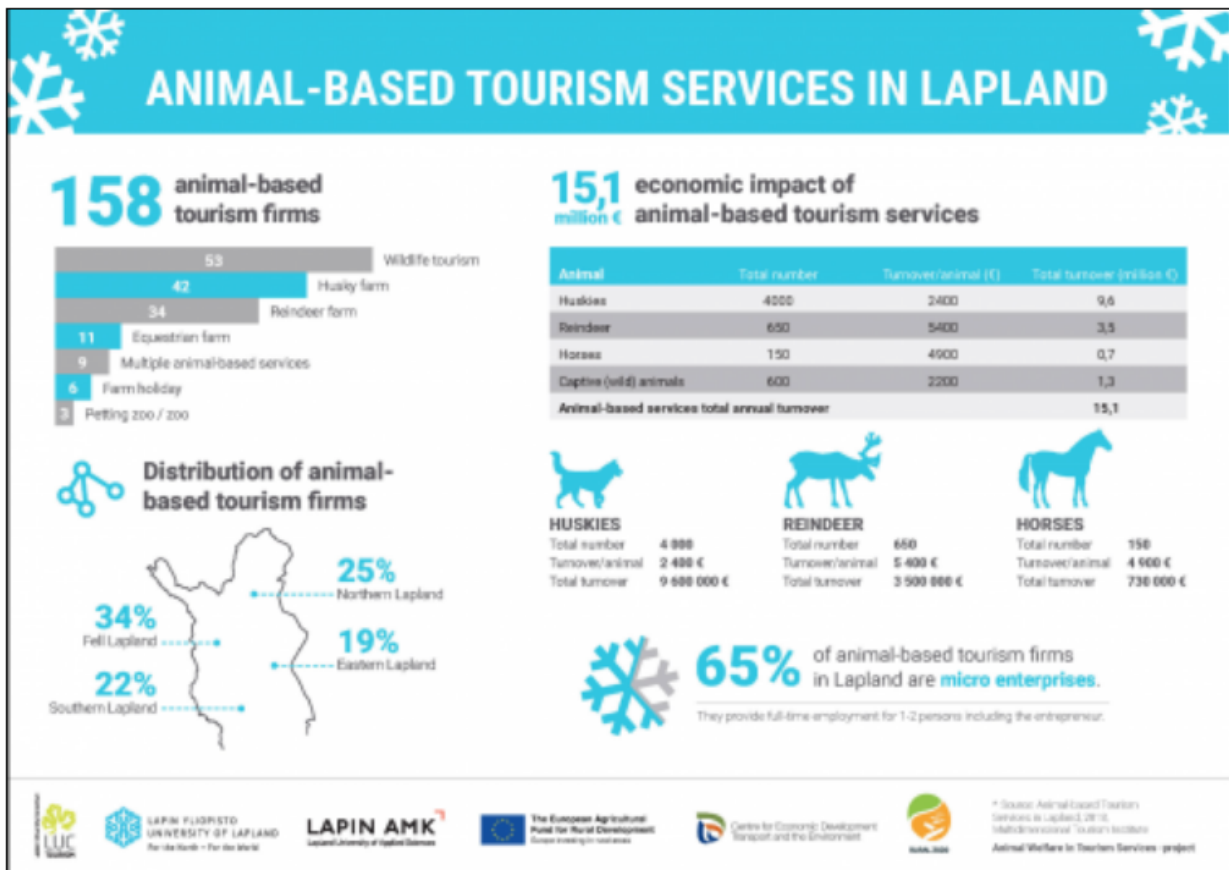


## ANIMAL WELFARE



## Quality in Animal Tourism Services

Quality in an animal-based tourism service can be summarized in a general perspective in three ways:

- From the Animal's perspective: their personalities and species-specific needs (feeding, care, safety, training, etc.) in relation to their work, working environment and equipment.
- From the customer's perspective: the safety of the service and the cleanliness of the service environment.
- From the employee's perspective: having sufficient resources, transparency in the operations and ongoing monitoring and training possibilities.

Since Finland aims to continue to lead the way in animal-based tourism in Scandinavia, we need to ensure that we are operating at the highest possible quality level. And, since animals are the core part of the business of many tourism companies operating in Northern Finland, quality starts with animals and their welfare since there are straight links from this to service quality and customer satisfaction.

Essentially, when the animal is doing well, the customer, employees and entrepreneurs all do well. At the same time, both management and employees need to share the same values and philosophies concerning the treatment of animals. When either the animals or employees are treated more as resources or objects than as parts of the wider team, problems develop. Quite simply, optimal animal welfare, from a pragmatic perspective, makes good business sense.

Up until very recently, however, this wasn't an accepted norm in our out-of-date industry.

One of our key goals as a business has been to be part of a movement to drive change in the standards of sleddog welfare considered acceptable within the industry. For us, this means that we are actively working to support the sustainability of industry as a whole, since raising standards and driving a paradigm shift towards an approach that acknowledges life-long responsibility for the wellbeing of the dogs is going to be fundamental to the long-term viability of sleddog businesses.

Anna's long-term aim was to challenge and improve the existing standards of sleddog welfare in Finland (and then in Scandinavia, and then...), by starting a process of collaborative learning which would ultimately lead to a tipping point in perspective that would create a new norm. From a business perspective, the easiest way of driving that change is to make the financial implication of not conforming, higher and to make people decide to adhere to new practices from an economic incentive – since driving change through an inherent philosophical and ethical incentive is pretty challenging.

I believe that the development of a) base and b) optimal standards, transparent to the public and against which public can make their selection criteria when choosing between sleddog businesses, is one way of achieving this. However, what we don't want to do is to scare the public so much in the process of raising awareness, they believe that participation in the sport 'per se' is bad. Should that happen, all of the sleddogs on even the high-quality farms would effectively be put at risk. This is the route that PETA and many animal activists constantly drive towards but it is clearly and fundamentally the wrong approach and one that absolutely does not put the needs of the dog first.

Although we have explained in these pages that the development of optimal standards - ones that are neither too grey nor too black and white - and a means against which to assess them, is definitely going to be a challenge, it is one that the industry needs to drive internally.

There are many GREAT sleddog farms out there and animal rights activists would be better off campaigning for a surge in interest in geriatric sleddog care than in a ban on the industry itself. When I asked our vet if she thought that keeping sleddogs on farms was cruel she said 'absolutely not'. It is more cruel to keep an active dog that is bred to love to work in a family setting. However, the optimal would be that they could work as long and hard as they desire during their working lives and retire to a sofa when they are at the point that they would appreciate it (and not destroy the house in the process!).

Animal (sleddog) welfare to us as an organisation means creating an environment in which our dogs can access sufficient good quality food and water for them to be fit in body and able to pursue the actions that they enjoy. These actions include interacting with each other in a playful way, digging and sunbathing (and lying in shadows) in summer, running freely in open spaces, running in teams pulling sleighs, racing as a disciplined team unit, taking part in stimulating obedience training sessions throughout the year, being brushed and cuddled etc etc. All of these actions, in turn, lead to healthy, happy minds.

It also means keeping living areas clean, safe from predators and risk-free (ie well maintained). And it means having extra levels of care in place for the weak / sick and the young and old when they need it.

From a business perspective, it means putting innovative systems and tools into place that prioritise and safeguard the health and welfare of the animal in question for the whole of its life. The many data-recording and statistical tools we have designed to optimise dog care (tracking and optimising relative distances run, antibiotic usage, injury recovery time, heat status, vaccination histories and needs, summer training tools etc) are essentially to ensure that our dogs have the most stimulating and rewarding working life and the most relaxing retirement possible. Examples are presented in the records, wellbeing, medical, nutrition, puppy and 'ethical' sections of our website.

We believe that responsible sleddog businesses must also make a commitment to restricting the number of animals being bred and then cared for, to a number that can be supported by the (robust) business model in place. We do not accept that kennels or vets should be able to argue that there is an economic need for sleddog businesses to put the old or infirm animals to sleep. We believe that a no-kill policy – until medically recommended – should be the norm. Hence, driving understanding within the industry about the expectations of the modern tourist, to this end, has been an important part of the EU projects we have participated in.

Old calm dogs can provide great cage and running mates (for reduced distances) to wild unruly pups and youngsters and thereby teach them the behavioural ropes in a non-threatening way. They can also provide 1 on 1 training to dogs stepping into the lead-role in their place. Customers expect these hard-working animals to be more than commodities and should be able to vote with their feet and walk away from farms that treat them as disposable commodities at the end of their most useful phase of life.

However, since differentiating between kennels on the subject of welfare is still almost impossible for the client to do, the development of key systems to drive transparency in this area, has been one of our key goals.

To that end, we also actively challenge and engage vets and other officials on ethical subjects (like the unnecessary euthanasia of sleddogs) whenever possible, as part of an overall goal of driving change in perceptions about what should be considered morally acceptable.

As the animal rescue centre for our region, we also have a 100% no-kill policy for rescued dogs, and keep them at our own expense after the court-dictated time, until suitable homes can be found.

## ***Existing Certification Systems***

### ***Mush with Pride***

Although an almost obsolete standard over which there has been a level of controversy, Mush with Pride, established in 1991 as an organization of mushers who were concerned about the care and treatment of sled dogs in their traditional and modern uses and public perceptions of mushing, still remains the only recognized international standard in the sleddog world.

P.R.I.D.E. stands for 'Providing Responsible Information on a Dog's Environment' and it supports the responsible care and humane treatment of all dogs. Sled dog care and equipment guidelines developed through P.R.I.D.E. and assessed through voluntary kennel inspections, were the first of their kind. Kennels that exceed the recommended standards are awarded 'certification plus'.

Mush with PRIDE  
Kennel Certification Plus  
On this Date, October 10, 2013  
**Hetta Huskies  
of CAPE Lapland**  
Met the requirements of the  
Mush with PRIDE Kennel Inspection Program

  
Secretary, Mush with PRIDE

Given that our kennel has been independently rated as: 'Certification-Plus' against the MUSH with P.R.I.D.E. standards, that means that our standards exceed those which are currently accepted as 'Good' within the Sleddog Industry. 'Certification plus' is effectively the only available symbol of excellence.

This certificate therefore shows that our kennel is clean and in good condition; that the dogs appear both healthy and happy; that the dog houses and living systems (cages and chains) are in good repair and appropriate to the type of dogs we have and the weather conditions encountered here; that the dogs have sufficient access to water; that the storage and preparation of the dog food is in a clean and appropriate place and that the food itself is of good quality; that the pack has good social behaviour both within it and towards humans - a reflection of the good life standards they enjoy; that both pups and veterans are cared for equally and that breeding is deliberate and restricted.

Our written dog files which include everything to do with the dogs from their behaviour to their vaccination and medical treatment records, running distances and basic obedience abilities are pretty much unsurpassed and a source of real pride. So too is the fact that our kennel is one of the very few in Scandinavia with a 'no-kill' policy for the retirees and non-running dogs. Hence, all dogs here have the chance to live out their days enjoying a hard-earned rest.

### ***Introduction to the 3rd Edition of the Sleddog Standards (written by MUSH with Pride)***

It has been just over a decade since the 2nd Edition of the Mush with P.R.I.D.E. Sled Dog Care Guidelines were published. During that time, scientists have made great strides in their understanding of dog physiology, psychology and behavior. Researchers have studied working sled dogs, with the support of their mushers, some of whom are also Mush with P.R.I.D.E. members. Many of these research projects have validated sled dog care methods that have been practiced for more than a century. Others have challenged traditional ideas that have persisted among mushers for many generations. This research, in addition to the experience of dog mushers from around the world, has contributed to a better understanding of sled dogs' needs, and will lead to an increased level of care not only for our sled dogs, but also for companion dogs everywhere.

In this edition of the Guidelines we are following the lead established by Mush with P.R.I.D.E.'s founders and describing sled dog care practices that are humane, practical, relevant and that reflect the best available current information.

PRIDE's voluntary sleddog care guidelines can be downloaded, [here](#).

In the last few years we have been looking at the subject of responsible sleddog care in some detail and we have a whole section of our website which looks in more detail at [sleddog ethics](#) including more about [P.R.I.D.E.](#) as an organisation (including the reason behind the controversy). We have also extracted the information contained within and included it below, so as to facilitate comparison with the British Columbia voluntary codes of best practice.

*(More information about this can be found on our website).*

## **2015 World Responsible Tourism Awards**

Our work in sleddog welfare resulted in us being awarded a GOLD award in the **2015 World Responsible Tourism Awards** in the 'Best Animal Welfare Initiative' category.

## **CHALLENGING CHANGE**

### **The Limitations of Finland's Current Sleddog Welfare Regulations**

In Finland, the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry is the ultimate authority in terms of the implementation of, and compliance with, the Animal Protection Act. The Food Safety Authority directs and supervises, and the Regional State Administrative Agency implements, within its territory.

The municipal health officer responsible for supervising and monitoring animal welfare law within a municipality, a designated veterinarian and an animal protection supervisor from the regional state administrative agency can all be involved in inspections. The inspector has the right to enter the premises where the animal is kept and audit both the animal and the animal's facilities and food preparation areas

Finland has, arguably, some of the toughest animal welfare legislation in the world and each farm is supposed to be assessed annually. However, when it comes down to what is best for the dogs on the sleddog farms, I am not entirely sure that the law is very applicable and feeding back into the system of laws is almost impossible. According to Maneesha Deckha, an associate professor of law at the University of Victoria, animal protection laws worldwide tend to be narrow in scope and only protect certain animals from certain types of treatment that we, as a culture, find shocking.

Clearly from the law's perspective, despite there being literally thousands of dogs currently working in this industry, there is clearly nothing in particular that they need to be protected from, since they are simply classified as a general **small animal** under the law. In other words, the vet checks are carried out against the same set of criteria used to assess the care of small pets (including dogs, cats, rabbits and other hobby animals including hunting dogs). Sleddogs moved into this category, in terms of vet 'checks' in the 2010 addendum to the **animal welfare act**.

Prior to this, they were assessed, rather, against general **'farm-animal'** assessment standards. Some might argue that this is a move in a good direction in that farm animals are bred as commodities, and their ultimate aim is to enter the food chain. Hence, the 'when to kill' decision for them is a simple commercial equation.

In reality, however, the way in which sleddogs is kept is generally pretty different to how most pets are kept and, similarly, it is pretty different to the way in which most farm animals are kept. In other words, it is probably high time that there was legislation specific to this particularly important part of the northern economy.

When I discussed this recently with a vet, she pointed out that there is some incentive within the farming system (in the form of reduced price operations etc) for farms that go 'above and beyond' in terms of the treatments they offer to their livestock and that this incentive for high quality care doesn't apply to small animal pets. Moving sleddogs to the latter category, therefore, can have its own risks.

If, rather, sleddogs were seen positively within the farm animal category, veterinary support for 'above and beyond' treatments like, for instance, spaying females with frequently infected and non-responsive mammary discharges (to reduce their very high risk of mammary tumours), (or prior to adoption, to reduce the likelihood of further pregnancies) or for castrations for dogs with retained testicles (cryptorchidism) to reduce their otherwise 70% likelihood of testicular cancer onset - or, indeed, for expensive eye drop treatments for dogs with Panus or glaucoma, which likely go untreated, at present, in many farms, maybe this would be a good thing? I am sure that the vets would have a better idea about the treatments which would be worthwhile incentivising but anyway, it was an interesting perspective.

(This also made me also think about the diagnostic limitations of where we live. When we started our farm, the nearest Xray facility was 300km away and therefore required a round-trip journey of almost an entire day, to get, for instance, a limp investigated in more depth. Whilst that may be relatively easily justifiable to a pet owner with just one dog, a farm with 150 times more need for diagnostic tools is going to have to limit the journey to the most extreme cases or they will spend an almost unjustifiable amount of time and money in diagnosing issues amongst some of their dogs at the potential 'expense' of the rest. Now, the situation is better in that there is one Xray facility 200km south and another, 200km SE but those using the machines are not yet very skilled so you have to also take that into consideration when considering the transport of the animal in question and whether the resulting information will be useful or not.

5 - 6 hours to take a dog for Xray and back is still a considerable time cost in addition to the inherent risk of travelling 400km on icy roads in sub-zero temperatures, often in the polar night or through a storm - and whilst the system obviously 'thinks' that such life and death calls are easy to make and totally justifiable, I am truly not sure that they are. Hence, the decision as to whether to investigate the underlying issue causing a problem with the dog or just 'put it down' or leave it untreated until the summer months when time is more readily available and the risk factor involved in driving, reduced are real questions.

#### Current Veterinary Check Limitations: Judgement Calls - the challenge of the 'grey'

Clearly there are some obvious parameters which can be checked by visiting vets - for instance the number of dogs contained within a specific cage size or the length of chains to which dogs are attached. In reality, however, farms can simply claim that dogs are temporarily together with others or 'temporarily' on travel chains at the time of a

check even if in reality the dogs may not move off small lengths of travel chains for months at a time. Who would be any wiser? Similarly, if the check is carried out on a sunny day, the farm is going to look a lot more well drained than if the check is carried out in snow-melt season, and whilst the vets can compensate for conditions to a degree, depending on their level of experience (which also varies, a lot, vet by vet), the checking procedure is still a fairly challenging one for the vets.

And, even if it is clear that SOME huskies MAY need an isolated kennel and others, not, what IS an insulated kennel, (since the quality seems to vary so tremendously between the farms) and what degree of 'huskiness' does a husky need to have to NOT need an insulated kennel? etc. None of these things are apparently definable, since they are yet to be defined.

The assumption - even between vets - is that 'fluffy' dogs do not need insulated kennels. However, we have seen that the fluffiest of the arctic breeds that have come to us from farms without insulated kennels are vastly more prone to testicular and mammary frostbite than even short-haired alaskan breeds on our own farm who have lived in insulated kennels all their lives. Clearly once a dog gets frostbite once, it is, like humans, more susceptible to it in the future. Hence, some of the assumptions within the industry pertaining to the arctic breeds might actually need to be questioned!

*Incidentally, the only research I have found on the subject of kennels used in sleddog centres in Scandinavia was by Julia Hofman, from Lunds University, Sweden, in 2014. Her dissertation is available [here](#)*

Similarly, what constitutes 'exercise frequently' in terms of summer months, and how can a farm show this / can a vet really check it? etc. Are standards going to impose MORE walking on farms than they do on private dog owners. Or less? What ARE private dog owners 'expected' to provide in terms of exercise? Most vets are aware, for instance, that very few sleddogs are handled or socialised a great deal in the summer months - but how can they prove or disprove that and what would that warrant, in terms of discipline towards the owners, if it needed to be addressed? At best, the vets are probably able to hazard a 'best guess' based on what they know of the owners and how many people work in the farm in the summer. But essentially, they can't really know, even if they want to go the extra mile and really do so.

In a similar vein, many dog farms have dogs which essentially spend their entire winters running multiday safaris, travelling from wilderness cabin to wilderness cabin where they sleep attached to short travel chains and predominately without kennels, along the way. Hence for these dogs it is pretty much irrelevant how well the farm kennels and chains meet the requirements of the law, since this is not where the dogs are living in the most challenging season. And yet it is fairly impractical to expect vets to travel out to check for conditions in wilderness cabins so the arguably 'most harsh' living conditions for the dogs are therefore seldom taken into account during checks.

Essentially, therefore, it would not be unjustifiable to question the usefulness of the current recommendations in terms of really assessing whether or not sleddogs live a healthy and stimulated / happy life vs a fairly miserable and unsocialised one.

#### State of living vs state of dying

More importantly, when it comes to owners choosing whether to treat illnesses or injuries or simply shoot / put the dogs down to save expense, the 'law' is that it is totally at the discretion of the owners. I believe that this is actually a far bigger issue for husky farms than whether or not, for example, the dogs are being kept on chain of exactly 3.6m, or not.

Of course, if we think of dogs in the same way as we do the animals feeding the human food chain (cows, sheep, pigs etc), clearly it is considered totally acceptable, by most of society, for farmers to simply shoot any animal for which the cost of treatment when injured or unhealthy (or old or not good gene-pool material etc), outweighs the monetary value of the animal. For many in the industry, sleddogs fall within this category of animal (despite them now being assessed more under the small animal legislation) and those who believe, as I do, that dogs are, and should be, in 'a bit of a different' category and should be treated more than as livestock commodities (eg considering the generations of effort that have gone into breeding for traits like sociability with humans), are considered naive.

It is definitely far from uncommon, for instance, for farms with some of the best names in the industry to purposefully breed annually with the aim of only keeping the cream of the crop and whilst this type of attitude is generally accepted as being OK, it will be interesting to see how long that status quo will be maintained as consumers become more knowledgeable about the behind-the-scenes reality.

Regardless of the rights or wrongs of the situation it remains that all a vet can do, when checking the state of a farm, at present, is to check that the alive animals are in reasonably good nick. Clearly, since this is also in the best interest of the farm owners, this side of things is generally a lot less of a real issue than the end of life issues which are a far more difficult and emotive issue to address.

### Supervisory Vets

One possible improvement that has come about recently in some regions, in terms of vet checks, is that there is a move towards there being a separate farm-health and welfare checking / supervisory vet from the 'treating' vets. The belief is that if a vet is more separate from the people that they are checking, they can maintain a little more distance from the people being assessed and can maybe speak more openly about any potential issues. The flip side, of course, is that they are less likely to really know the reality of the situation on the farm aside from during their annual spot checks, although I guess the thought is that that would at least confer with the treating vets and get their opinion about the real state of affairs.

In practice, we have not seen an improvement in this system by having a supervisory vet although she can try to take a stand when there are clear differences of opinion in treatment options by local vets. In reality, she sees little. We were reprimanded, for instance, for not following the judgement of our local non-specialist vet in a particular medical treatment decision in which we actually consulted a specialist vet and went, rather, with their recommendations. She did not realise we had consulted the specialist.

Similarly on another occasion communications from our local vets said that we were being irresponsible for keeping a dog that they had seen twice, alive, whereas specialists in Canada and Helsinki (as well as the vet working with us on our farm) all disagreed. When every second vet gives different advice, and the local advice is often just to 'put the animal down', farms have to, to some extent, use their own judgement and expertise, honed over the years. Farms, for instance, probably have a lot more practical expertise in wound care than the vets do...another area of grey.

Hence we would very much question the value in the **Greenkey** suggestion that a vet look at each and every dog once per year. On a farm of 200 dogs, that would take two to three days of a vet's time to do properly...and where would you stop. Would you record information against each and every dog? If so, that is almost a week of a vet's time to do anything 'real'. That would be such a huge time cost in that that many dogs that would actually not be able to receive either emergency treatments or planned operations at that time. We already have to choose between medical checks and operations since there are just not enough vets in place to look after the animals in their region so this would just decrease their quality of care. Certification systems need to make sense and think about the pragmatic impact of what they are suggesting.

### Veterinary Check Limitations: Judgement Calls - the challenge of the 'black and white'

Having talked, above, about how vague many of the current guidelines are, and how much pressure that puts on checking vets to effectively make judgement calls, it is worth considering the fact that on the flip side, having very prescriptive 'black and white' laws can also result in a similar problem and that if folk are asked to adhere blindly to the letter of such a law, they may not end up adhering to its spirit.

Let me explain.

One thing that IS actually pretty clear within the legislation, for instance, is that when dogs are attached to chains, the chains should be over 3.6m in length. I would argue, however, that this is not always in the best interest of all sled dogs, all of the time. I think that the length is too long, for instance, for a) small female huskies (for whom it is too heavy), b) young dogs getting used to the chain for the first time at c. 1 year of age (who get tangled a lot less when trained, first, on a shorter chain) and c) for dogs recovering from eg limps or other leg injuries which should have their movement restricted to a degree for their own good.

For this reason, whilst we comply with the letter of the law on our farm, we only comply with its spirit of the law in our sick dog / chain-training area. Luckily, to date, the fact that we have shorter chains in this area, has not been a problem for visiting / checking vets who have understood- and even agreed with, the 'why'. However, by turning a blind eye and allowing us to effectively break the rule, we are on thin ice when it comes to the law (even if the dogs in this area are never here permanently).

We are then asking for that same grey judgement call that we were saying was problematic, above, to come into effect, here, when checked by vets. The box which needs to be 'ticked' is simply one showing 'compliance' or not.... (Interestingly, in this particular aspect we are not too worried, since our sick-dog area chains are the same length as they are in a farm which went to court for the right to have shorter chains (and won). Hence, a precedent for challenging this length actually exists.)

A similar point could be argued with the current EU transportation laws which apply equally to our dogs (which get transported in -30C) and to house pets being transported in +30C in Spain. Clearly, it is fairly unlikely that the laws are optimum for both and yet owners in both areas have to theoretically comply or be negligent (even if they honestly believe that the laws are not in the best interest of the dogs).

It seems to be a big challenge, therefore, to write legislation which is clear enough to not need to be interpreted by the individual inspector (eg w.r.t. the kennel suitability / insulation - which, in turn, is also dependent, to a degree, on the type of sleddog in question - and many farms have a mixture of dogs and move them around, to further complicate matters!) whilst also being specific enough to meet the actual needs of the industry being checked.

#### What happens NOW when a farm is found to be non-compliant?

Following checks with the current system, vets write an 'official paper' about their basic findings on the day of their visit and in this, they write recommendations for change, when necessary, and a timeline within which they would like the change to happen.

Unless the vet considers the issue to be a very black and white or extreme case, however, from my experience, they are unlikely to either recheck it again within the year, or to take further action. Hence, in most cases, the checking system to date hasn't seemed to result in any positive change.

NB: I say this with a little trepidation since I am sure that some vets have had some impact on some farms. However, I have yet to hear, for instance, of anyone in the industry talking about any criminal proceedings which have been started against a farm, and this is surprising since nearly anyone in the industry could name a handful of farms which fall woefully short of basic needs and clearly meet neither the spirit or the letter of even the existing laws. There is even one case in Finland in the last two years in which the conditions on a particular farm had become so well known that a number of people in the industry were raising concerns, but the local vet said that they couldn't really do anything about it.

The movement towards having supervisory 'checking' vets is maybe one step in the right direction in this regard. There has been a worry about the fact that, to date, it might have been hard for local area vets who are not experienced in carrying out checks to actually know, without many farms to compare to, if standards on a farm they are checking are above or below average. And then you introduce the risk of some good farms being held accountable for small issues which they need to improve upon whilst at the same time, some terrible farms are effectively free of restrictions.

Similarly, there has been the worry that local area vets might be hesitant to blow a relationship with a farm if they thought that there was a chance it would mean that the dogs would just be shot or left untreated post injury rather than being brought to them if there was conflict between the parties.

All of these issues have been further compounded by the fact that veterinary inspectors cannot fine the farm owners directly so their only option, should they choose to take action against a farm, is to take an issue to the police and effectively make it a criminal offence. This is a hard route for any vet to choose to go down whilst there are not really any well agreed standards within the veterinary community as to when 'enough is really enough' and what really constitutes something that fulfills the spirit of the law (eg what DOES 'insulated' mean in terms of kennels / what does 'exercise frequently' mean in terms of summer months etc).



But before we think that everything is doom and gloom, please remember that the quality of life for the majority of sleddogs is not too bad! And just as the 'bad' farms are common knowledge in the industry, so too are the good ones. And, whilst most might have widely differing ideas as to what constitutes a 5\* performance in terms of sleddog welfare, (particularly w.r.t. end of life practices), everyone could no-doubt name 5 farms which they believe to be excellent in terms of sleddog welfare, in which the majority of dogs are probably looked after as well, or better, than the average small animal pet.

### Other relevant legislation

Meanwhile, the links given here are to Finnish legislation which in some way pertains to the dog farms.

For instance, the Animal Feed Legislation, Animal Welfare Legislation, (and further amendments about the same, EU Regulations with regards to Animal Health, EU Regulations regarding transport, the food act, becoming a vet and dealing with waste. Environmental Health assessments are discussed here and information about an EU-funded project looking at these issues is discussed here.

Unfortunately, part of the reason why I cannot claim that this list covers everything of relevance is purely and simply because the legislation is generally not available in English. This makes it almost impossible to find when farm owners like myself try to track it down. This is actually a real issue due to the number of sledfarms in Scandinavia which are either owned or run by foreigners. (This is not-surprising, given that it is impossible to follow this passion elsewhere in Europe).

I do know, for instance, that a group of interested vets in Rovaniemi (part of Lapland's regional state administrative agencies (Lapin aleuhallintovirasto), started to put together some 'points' to work against relating to sleddog welfare - but I couldn't find any information about their meetings on the relevant websites e.g. here.

Similarly the EU project which was set up to look at quality and safety in sleddog industry presented a couple of 'official' booklets on the subject which were written by the project leader (who had more expertise in reindeer husbandry than in dogsledding and who, unfortunately, did not involve any sleddog companies in the process. I cannot access the material since it is in Finnish but my husband said that they weren't worth translating, since they were pretty much the same ones that she had written at the end of an EU reindeer-husbandry project but with the name switched to sleddogs. Clearly that was a good opportunity for the development of something useful for the industry which somehow just got missed.

Since this is clearly one of the key business areas in which foreign investors / entrepreneurs can be attracted to these regions, the need for language accessibility is particularly important and this should also be recognised by authorities when drawing up new laws and recommendations.

### What should be done, moving forward?

What IS clear is that, given how important this industry is within the tourism market in Finland, there is a real need for work to be done in this area. Ideally before the accepted standards become more understood by the participating clients who might not just speak with their feet, by going to the better farms, but who could demand a more substantive change (eg with greyhound racing in Australia at present) which could negatively impact the industry as a whole.

We have started to draw up our own ideas for both '*codes of best practice*' and *minimal standard regulations* that might work for Finland / Scandinavia using both current legislation and the codes and regulations BC developed as a starting point and these have been shared with the area vets who, in turn, are offering them up to those looking at these laws at present. These are definitely a work in progress but it is a job that is clearly overdue.

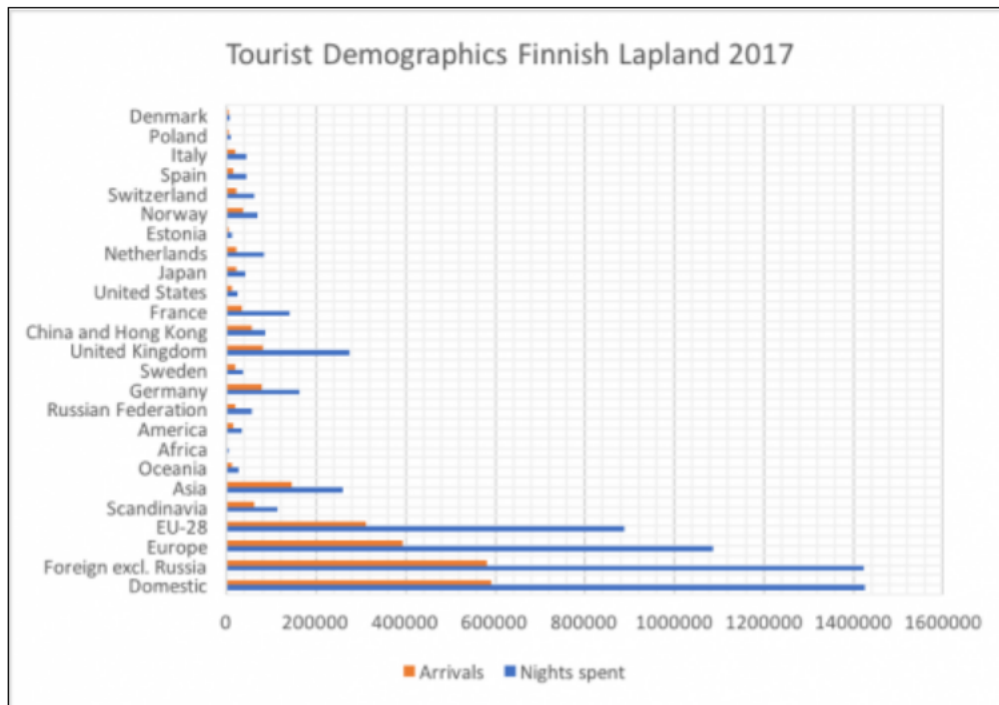
## Why Finland should lead the way in Europe w.r.t. tougher sleddog welfare guidelines

### Tourism...a major player in the economy

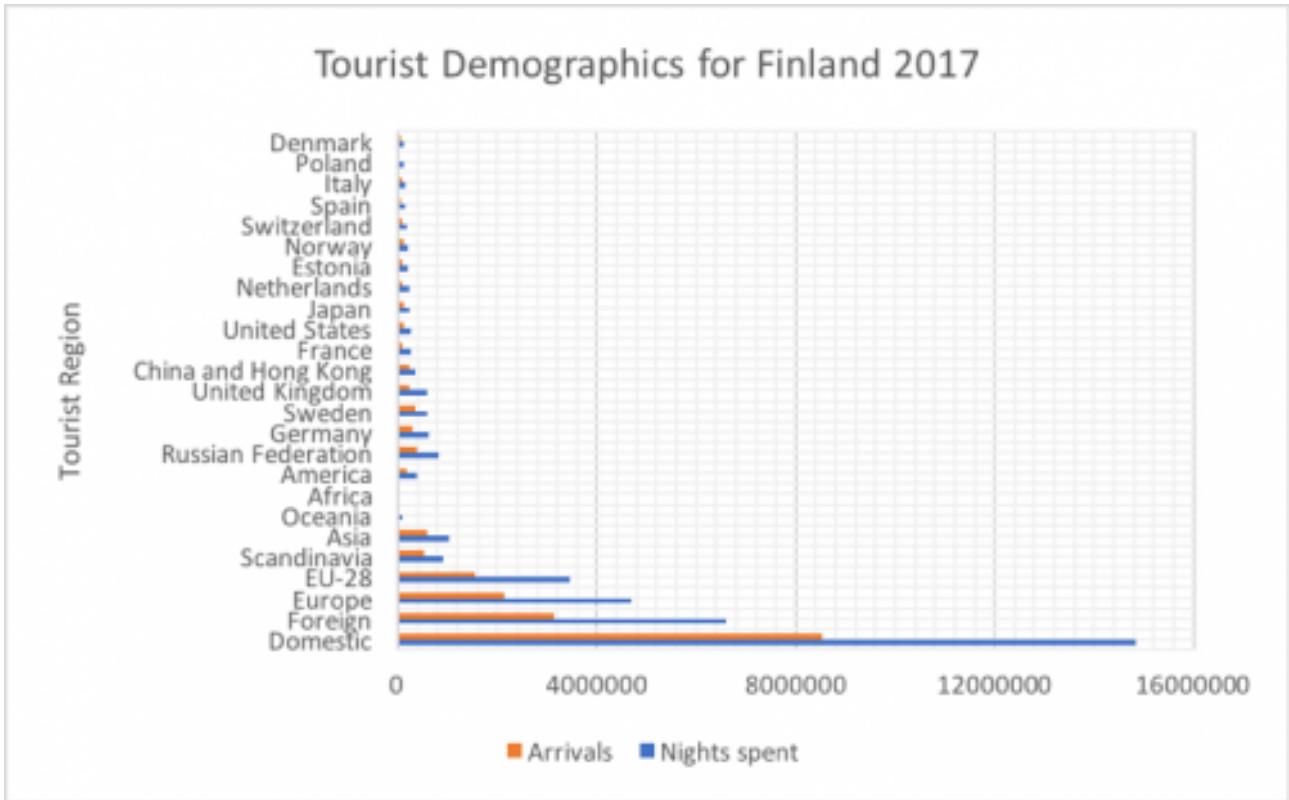
The number of international journeys surpassed one billion in 2012. In 2030, people are estimated to go on 1.8 billion trips abroad. The travel industry generates around 10% of the world's GDP.

In 2017, people who live outside Finland visited our country 8.3 million times. Overnight stays by visitors grew a staggering 14%, hitting a new record at 6.6 million. The biggest sources of visitors are still Russia, Germany, Sweden, the UK and China. The Finnish travel industry employs around 140,000 people, and the number is expected to reach 180,000 by 2025.

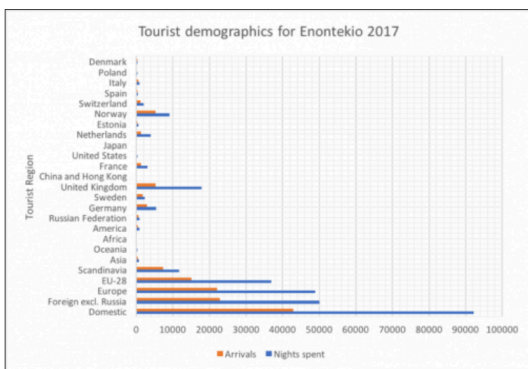
According to Visit Finland 2018, the numbers for domestic tourists and foreign tourists visiting Finnish Lapland are extremely similar. Statistics Finland (2018) back up the above figures from Visit Finland in their report outlining that the two largest groups of foreign visitors were from the United Kingdom and Asia. In December 2017, the number of British people staying overnight in Finnish Lapland had increased by 5% from the year previous. Additionally, there was a 2% increase from the previous year, in the number of Asians visiting (up by 53,000).



It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of people employed within the tourism sector within Finland as a whole is > 5.5% of the population. In rural areas, including the fourteen key regions that comprise Finnish Lapland, (ref. the Visit Lapland 2018 figure shown here), this figure is far higher.



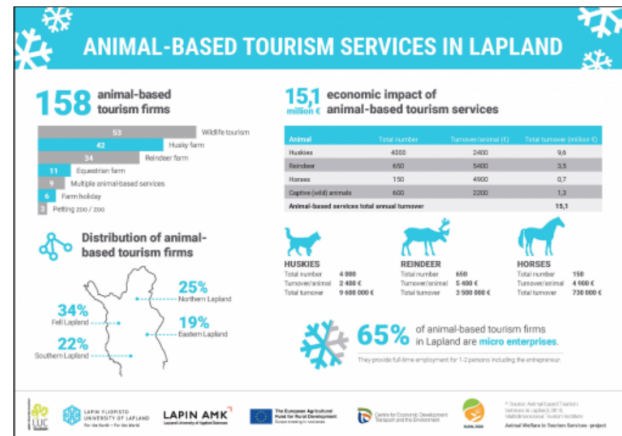
In our small municipality which borders Norway and Sweden, domestic tourists dominate, followed by those from other countries in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. Asian tourism is almost non-existent (unlike in eastern Lapland). Burkhard (2016) reported that the top two travel trends for 2017 was going to be centred around millennials, action and adventure. Whilst the specific age range given to millennials is widely disputed (Glass, 2007), generally anyone born post-nineties fits into the category and are widely described as travellers looking for unique and thrilling excursions with millennials set to spend \$1.4bn in the next year (BBC Global News Limited, 2017). The BBC (2017) also suggested that there is a clear divide in millennials and their needs, wants and decision making based on their financial background with 'affluent-millennials' choosing to travel for things such as shopping and parties, whilst 'non-affluent millennials' are more likely to pursue once in a lifetime experiences and cultural and spiritual journeys.



## **Animal Tourism Finland**

### *Slowly, Slowly, Slowly*

In the summer of 2016, 11 Finnish tourism companies came together to work in conjunction with the Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI) of the University of Lapland in a project called "Animals and Responsible Tourism: Promoting Business Competitiveness through Animal Welfare". This was the culmination of a 3 year goal, by Anna, to bring companies to the table to challenge current practices in sleddog welfare and to develop transparency in standards to customers, moving forward. Whilst Anna's focus was exclusively on sleddogs, the project decided to also incorporate the other key arctic animals used in Finnish tourism services (horses, reindeer, wild-animals (both in hunting and in 'watching'), etc).



The primary part of the project's funding came from Tekes – the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation – under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Each participating company also contributed at least €1000 to be part of the project, in addition to making the financial and time commitment to travel to meetings across Lapland over the course of the 2 year project.

The 10 participating Finnish tourism companies, in addition to Hetta Huskies / CAPE Lapland Oy, are Lapland Safaris, Harriniva, Ranua Wildlife Park, Arctic Reindeer, Arctic Husky Farm, Northern Gate Safaris, Nurminiemen Ratsutila, OFF-Piste Adventures, Polar Lights Tours and Ruska Laukka. Three international partners are also collaborating closely:

- David Fennell, Professor, Brock University, International Institute for Animal Ethics (IIAE)
- Joonas Rokka, Associate Professor of Marketing, EMLYON Business School
- Marloes Van de Goor, International Institute for Animal Ethics (IIAE)

The main objectives of the project are:

- to increase understanding of animal welfare as part of responsible tourism businesses
- to examine quality certifications and standards including animal welfare criteria
- to study consumer values in relation to animals and their use in tourism and
- to create knowledge of animal welfare principles relating to tourism in Northern Finland specifically

To follow project progress and outcomes, please follow the **Animal Tourism Finland blog**. There are a number of webinars scheduled over the coming months that look at different project issues. One of the first webinars was with Pasi and you can see that video (in Finnish but with subtitles) [here](#). You can also follow snapshots of the project's progress through [twitter](#).

In 2017 the EU-funded project 'Animal Welfare in Tourism Services' carried out a survey of the number of animal-based tourism operators and sleddogs working in Northern Europe.

At that time in Finnish Lapland, the number of animal-based tourism companies both selling directly to tourists and with discoverable websites was 158. Of these, 42 were husky companies (34, reindeer companies and 11, equestrian farms). However, in reality it is thought that there are probably twice that number who are effectively hidden because of either selling through other companies or working in conjunction with the larger farms in the winter months. Animal-based tourism in this instance refers to tourism involving sleddogs, reindeer, horses and also zoos / open farms.

If we consider the husky farms alone, there are 43 husky farms in Lapland with their own websites and yet one of the large ones, just down the road from us, owned by Santa Safaris / Transun UK, is not 'findable' through any web searches or as a standalone business entity. Similarly the next nearest farm to us, which has c. 40 dogs, simply works with other companies in winter time.

Hence, whilst the 43 'discoverable' husky companies across Finnish Lapland have c.4000 dogs, the real number of dogs in Finnish Lapland is likely to be twice as high as that. In our veterinary area alone, our area vet estimates that there are c. 17 sleddogs farms and c. 2000 dogs (with 2-5 more transitory 'farms' in the winter time). However, I think that that number is probably closer to 3000 dogs. And if you consider the wider region and the next nearest towns and cities in Sweden and Norway (Kiruna, Alta, Karasok and Tromso), we are probably talking about something in the region of 5-6000 dogs.

### What is the value of this industry?

For Finnish Lapland, the value of animal based tourism has been estimated to be c.€50 million/year. This means that the income generated through reindeer tourism is now comperable to the value of reindeer through in the meat industry. Similarly, sleddogs and related program services have long been one of the main winter tourism attractions and as such, they form a pivotal component in the health of tourism in the region. Just one sleddog is estimated to make 3000€ turnover per year (horses, €3500 and reindeer, €).

In Enontekiö, where we are based, tourism equated to c. 50% of the municipality's direct income in 2011 - and since this sector of the market has grown a lot since then, I believe that it is probably a higher percentage, today. From a political perspective, our 'region' is combined with Kittilä, Sodankylä and Muonio for many purposes. Collectively, in this greater area, tourism is responsible for 30% of the economy and the 1000s of sleddogs and 10s of sleddog farms operating in this region are an important component of this.

Despite all of this, sleddogs are currently protected very poorly under existing national legislations. There are neither enforceable sleddog-specific regulations dictating their basic standard of care, nor are there agreed-upon voluntary codes of best practice for the farms to baseline against.

When considered in this light, it becomes obvious that we should be spearheading a European drive towards tighter legislation in order to safeguard this important part of the northern economies.

Clearly the security of the tourism industry is of vital importance to Lapland and this will require systematic efforts to ensure both high quality and safety standards and sustainable development of small rural tourism businesses. The image that the sleddog industry has, internationally, within each region, will clearly impact on its growth and sustainable development. Therefore definining minimum standards at which the least advanced of the sleddog businesses has to be seen to comply will increase confidence in the reputation of the sector as a whole.

According to the World Tourism Organization, future customers will increasingly demand quality, safety, environmental consideration of the local nature and authenticity. As product development and marketing will become increasingly more closely tied to the needs and expectations of the customer group, different age groups will also demand and develop their own products, thus creating further challenge within sled dog tourism.

Tour operators and other customer groups will increasingly require that the program services provided are operating under a documented safety and quality program and the sleddog industry needs to be proactive vs reactive in this regard to safeguard its own future.

We are currently using the earth's resources at such a rate that it is unable to replenish them, millions of people live in poverty of food, health and opportunity, and we're creating imbalances in systems that we rely on for our health and survival - climate change, declining fish stocks and inequality are evidence of this.

Creating a sustainability strategy is a responsibility for all businesses, and leading businesses are taking it more and more seriously as they identify the opportunities it presents for efficiency savings, meeting changing

AREA	Direct tourism income in EUR (Välittön matkailutulot euroa)	Immediate income from tourism in man-years of employment. (Välittön matkailutulot työllisyys htv.)	The % of tax income for the municipality which comes from travel tourism (Matkailun osuus toimialoista %)	Tax from Tourism-related Salaries (Palkkaverotulo vaikutukset euroa)
Enontekiö	21,620,277	155,2	49,9	488,105
Kittilä	11,602,9421	869	27,3	2,778,479
Muonio	27,129,874	200,3	32,5	669,261
Sodankylä	27,797,819	203,8	10,9	790,168
Rovaniemi	174,866,965	1224,8	7,8	5,186,283
Pelkosenniemi	10,405,220	76,5	45,7	260,256
Ranua	7,089,527	43,6	8,5	150,538
Inari	75,961,398	511,1	41,5	1,703,032
Kemijärvi	15,826,607	98,2	9,3	394,331
Salla	8,084,630	59,7	15,1	212,634
Utsjoki	6,841,682	42,7	18	178,414
<b>Altogether</b>	<b>544,387,751</b>	<b>3858</b>		<b>14056040</b>

consumer desires, and innovation. A sustainability strategy or plan ensures that a business has a financial future whilst respecting environmental boundaries and improving social conditions.

But sustainability isn't a science, and we don't know all the answers, so it's best to consider it as more of a journey than an outcome. This document is the first step on this journey.

#### Regional Cooperation Needs between Stakeholders

Regional cooperation between businesses will also become more vital as tourist numbers increase. When it comes to the dog sled businesses in particular, an important aspect of securing their long-term viability will be linked to the outcome of negotiations with reindeer herders and other land users over protecting their access to an operational route network. Cooperation should clearly support the northern region's natural and cultural values and provide customers with authentic northern experiences and clearly consumers want access to both reindeer farms and sleddog enterprises (and snowmobiles and the ski track network - and some of these use the same trails!). Even though securing cooperation between the various stakeholders is likely to be a challenging process and one which will need to be handled sensitively, the risk factor involved in avoiding such discussions is potentially too high for each of the industries.

As cooperation between the northern business grows and the stability of their operations increases, the cultural and environmental risk that currently exists from the sleddog companies travelling north to work in the area just in peak seasons should hopefully decrease. Those who live and work year-round in any given area have an incentive to ensure that the trails are, for instance, disease free, and that the needs of their neighbours are respected. Companies visiting for only a short time have less incentive to invest in, or care about the cultural issues or nature in an area.

In 2014, for instance, Santa Safaris / Transun (a UK company) chose to bring a Swedish company to Enontekiö for the short winter season rather than using local businesses and they unfortunately carried kennel cough with them and infected some local dogs - thus putting all of the area's dogs (not just sleddogs) at risk. This disease is periodically a big risk to the whole industry since farms with kennel cough should theoretically close their doors and let the dogs just rest until it has passed through. In reality, there is so much pressure to make them earn their keep during the few short months when it is possible that the farms are likely to hide the fact that they have the disease and hope for the best in terms of the long term health of the dogs. A healthier model for sharing trails between the sleddog companies would be the one that is being developed in Alta for 2016 in which the farms are working towards an agreement to give an additional nasal vaccine to all of the dogs sharing the same trails during the same time frame - and to communicate with each other if any farm sees any symptoms of their challenging illness. That level of cooperation is definitely something to aim for, in each sleddog area, in the future.

The risk from outside operators is not just, however, in terms of disease. Trail access is such a sensitive subject - particularly in the Saami areas - that it is vital that those using the trails respect the shared need of local stakeholders. Since outside companies do not necessarily understand the local issues or sensitivities, they might, for instance, use trails that the reindeer herders have specifically asked the sleddog companies to steer clear of, during calving time, thus increasing resentment unnecessarily between the industries. That is definitely one challenging aspect of assigning access to trail networks since the fear for the herders is that if the dogs are allowed to run on more and more trails, their herd will be impacted. In reality, the visiting private sleddog owners pretty much currently go where they want irrespective of the needs of the herders and the companies residing in the area are generally restricted to such a tiny track network that when the reindeer herders ask them to take alternative routes to avoid reindeer movements, they have no routes open to them. All of these issues need careful consideration in order to safeguard the development of the northern industries in a sustainable manner in the face of a growing tourism need.

**In order to protect this business in the changing face of consumer-driven pressure for responsible use of animals in tourism practices grows worldwide, it is time to take action and to develop meaningful and targeted guidelines as well as recommended best practices for the sleddog industry.**

#### *What should be done, moving forward?*

What is clear is that, given how important this industry is within the tourism market in Finland, there is a real need for work to be done in this area. Ideally before the accepted standards become more understood by the participating clients who might not just speak with their feet, by going to the better farms, but who could demand a more substantive change (eg with greyhound racing in Australia at present) which could negatively impact the industry as a whole.

Ultimately, the way to drive change in any industry is to incrementally work towards a change in perspective until such point - the tipping point - that the new perspective becomes the norm.

The forms against which the farms are currently assessed can be found [here](#).  
The area's plan for monitoring the animal health and welfare can be found [here](#):

FYI: Unfortunately, the legislation is generally not available in English and this makes it almost impossible to even find when farm owners like myself try to track it down. This is actually a real issue due to the not-surprising (given that it is impossible to follow this passion elsewhere in Europe) number of sledfarms in Scandinavia which are either owned or run by foreigners.

Since this is therefore one of the key business areas in which foreign investors / entrepreneurs can be attracted to these regions, language accessibility needs should also be recognised by authorities when drawing up new laws and recommendations.

Finland's tourism strategy states: "Lapland is measured by the quality of tourism indicators, Finland's top province. Lapland will continue to be both corporate and tourist center at the level of quality development as a pioneer. The quality of the components, in particular the security of tourism and draws attention to "sustainable development. This will require systematic efforts to develop long-term operation of small rural tourism businesses. In northern Finland the main program service are valjakkokoira- and reindeer farm tourism. Quality and safety are important entities in the development of the above mentioned companies. Demanding arctic conditions require a diverse knowledge of the area.

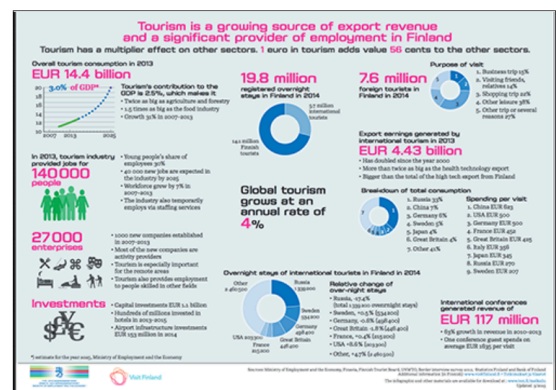
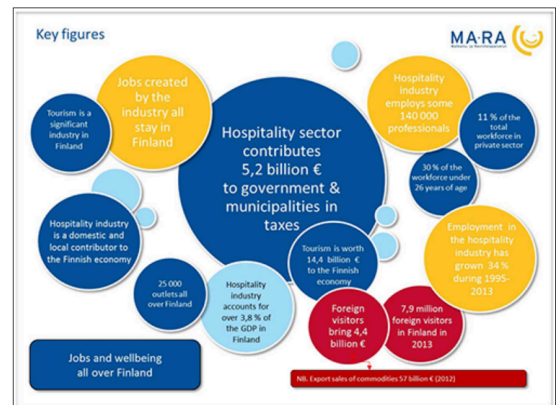
Chiawa (2015) explains that responsible tourism is a philosophy focused on reinventing the tourism industry for the benefit of humanity, travellers and the industry by which global accreditation to organisations for acting responsibly is given by travellers unto travellers. However, there is evidence of societal change where new organisations such as the World Responsible Tourism Awards look to give credit to companies looking forward to change in return for a healthier environment and increased morality (Responsible Tourism 2016).

Market research commissioned by Tui in January 2017 (and reported by Tui in 2018) showed that around 70% of holidaymakers wanted the option of excursions...of those holidaymakers, 60% said they would only feel that way if those attractions met global animal welfare standards.

Whilst Finnish operators are challenging standards and promoting responsible tourism, there is still a long way to go in standardizing the conditions in which animals should live. There are so many perceptions about optimal animal welfare that there is a real risk that activists aiming for responsible tourism may actually force irresponsible tourism on companies faced with finding new homes for their animals forced out of tourism due to contemporary social values of consumers (Mikko Äijälä cited by Lapin Kansa 2017).

According to a Norwegian food safety scientific committee, dogs should be allowed at least ten hours of free exercise per week.

Cooperation between sleddog businesses and reindeer farms is a contentious partnership - negotiating routes and other major issues common, and it can be added to the product development and marketing, and even common messuesiintymisillä. Once obtained, the companies also horse program services to offer, we can talk about the reindeer herding area of animal tourism.



Cooperation between sleddog businesses and reindeer farms is a contentious partnership - negotiating routes and other major issues common, and it can be added to the product development and marketing, and even common messuesiintymisillä. Once obtained, the companies also horse program services to offer, we can talk about the reindeer herding area of animal tourism.

## **RESPECT NOT NEGLECT**

FYI: This is one of the many sections on our website that looks directly at sleddog welfare and how clients can learn to look beyond first impressions to create a real understanding of the welfare of the dogs in the kennels they may choose to sled with.

One of the ways in which Hetta Huskies, as a kennel, stands out head and shoulders above most others, is because of the level of care given to the dogs.

We have added this section to our website since we know that some clients believe that all kennels in Scandinavia care for their dogs at a similar level and, sadly, that is just not the case. Even though most kennels and owners are clever enough to say they care for their dogs in their marketing literature, dressing up the facts do not make them true.

If this is at all important to you and you are trying to choose between companies, you will need to delve a little more deeply to find out the reality when it comes to the welfare of the animals you will be working with. There are some easy ways in which to get a good feel for the kennel / farm you are thinking about going on safari with and to be assured that your money is going back into well cared-for huskies.

NB: Even if this is not a deal breaker, for you, it is worth considering the fact that companies which have a real ethical commitment to the quality of care they invest in their dogs tend to be the same companies with good reputations for quality and care when it comes to their human clients!

At Hetta Huskies we aim for the highest standards in all aspects of our company! We encourage you to also have high standards in your dog sledding experience and to take part in humane mushing!

We also encourage you to think that the care of the sled dogs, from what they eat, where they live and what they sleep in is just as important as how much the tour itself will cost (but our prices are at the extremely reasonable end of the scale, too)!

### **How will I know if the farm looks after the dogs well or not?**

First, check the images and information on their marketing materials and see how transparent, open and forthcoming the farms are about their standards when questioned, or, conversely, whether they are evasive about them.

Reputable kennels can normally always offer detailed information about the care of their dogs and this information should be transparent. Unfortunately, we have seen images taken of our farm by area marketing boards being used in brochures in other countries in Europe to portray other farms which are not so photogenic for whatever reason. Most of the good farms will have lots of images of their farm and kennels on their media platforms in addition to the standard pictures of people and children cuddling dogs since they will be proud of how well maintained and clean it is.

They will also not merely mention their sled dog ethics in passing or as they feel like it is required but they will proudly talk about their efforts in this department and will explain their ethos. If they are not willing to be completely transparent in regards to the care of their animals, then there is likely to be a problem.

We have seen this first hand when we tried to approach the french company which owned a farm in the South of Finland in case they weren't aware that the management practices in place were raising concerns both in public forums and within the Finnish sleddog community (multiple pups being killed, per year, because of unwanted pregnancies taken to term, and the general condition of the farm), we simply got no response. When we followed up by asking a French guide to approach as a prospective client, she was twice brushed off when she asked just about the quality of care of the dogs with comments about how she would see for herself that they were well taken care of when she got there.

Hence, it seems like they were deliberately unaware of what was going on and there isn't much more than one can do in that instance.

Similarly, the only other farm in Enontekiö raises concerns in the industry despite the great marketing material images of dogs running and pulling in a beautiful setting with smiling clients which are put out by the British



company which owns it. When queried by clients, they claim that they rehome old dogs and never put a dog down apart from on a vet's recommendation. But unfortunately, that is simply untrue. Hence, trying to see behind the rhetoric is very difficult for even fairly knowledgeable clients. In most cases like this, however, you can get a glimpse of the truth from the fact that the information that they can actually give you about their dog care, when approached on the subject directly, is likely to be limited to fluffy rhetoric about what they imagine you would want them to say.

### **Try to ask some more questions**

For example, ask about how many people look after the dogs, both in summer and winter and how experienced those people are / how long they have worked on the farm since this will tell you a lot about how well the kennel manager, guides and farmhands actually know the dogs.

Having a core group of people who intimately know and love the dogs and provide continuity in their care, is critically important for the welfare and safety of the animals.

Most farms with c. 100 dogs have only a couple of people caring for them in summer and some with up to 600 dogs still with only three or four people looking after them in summer. When this is the case, it is almost impossible for each dog to receive the personal, top notch care, love, attention and exercise they need and deserve.

We have been blessed by having guides who have returned to us year after year. Some return in the summers because they love the training and building side of things and take pride in the kennel looking and functioning as well as possible. Others return for the intense winter challenge and they know the dogs more in terms of how they are as team athletes. These returning guides form the backbone of our team and they also oversee the development of the trainees who have to stay with us for a minimum of three months.

Having a rotating group of folk who go through training in working with sled dogs in addition to the core group of guides is beneficial in that it helps the shy dogs to realise that the approach of new people is not a scary thing. Our medical supervisors and training managers are critical roles and the guides who take on these roles do so with intensity and passion and they know the dogs intimately.

We look for guides with sound judgement, a full understanding of their role and responsibilities, and an ability to communicate effectively with their group. We offer competitive rates of pay, provide relevant training and welcome suggestions and input, thus promoting commitment, motivation and effectiveness.

### **Do they say that they meet current industry standards or that they go way beyond?**

Whilst most Scandinavian kennels are subject to annual visits by vets, the standards of care they can measure against and comment upon are so minimal that the visit is almost a token gesture.

At present, and maybe surprisingly, given the number of dog farms in Scandinavia, there are no well thought out guidelines or quality of care recommendations for working sledwork farms. The only internationally recognised standard - Mush with Pride - is fairly minimal in terms of what it asks and it only scratches the surface of what is needed.

Indeed, the only area that has done a great deal of work in this regard is the British Columbia region of Canada which initiated an investigation into kennel standards after a worker sued for mental damages after having to shoot c. 100 dogs. Through the work of a high level task force, they initiated, in c. 2012, both a Sled Dog Code of Practice (effectively best practices; Click [here](#) if you are interested in learning more) and a Sled Dog Standards of Care Regulations (enforceable guidelines under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (Click [here](#) if you are interested in learning more). In Scandinavia, however, nothing like this exists and, therefore, kennels can really get away with doing 'not very much' when it comes to care of the dogs.

### **What do Vet Checks Include at Present in Finland**

At present, vets can effectively check some basic quality of life criteria like the length of chains the dogs are attached to and that the kennels are raised off the ground.

Ironically, we think that the legal length of the chains is actually too long for, eg, our little girls to lug around behind them but we comply, aside from in our sick dog area where the vet agrees that it is better to restrict movement. Very few farms conform and in many places the dogs are on quite short chains which are connected to the kennels themselves so the dogs have very little range of movement and in only two planes. In many places, farms have

dogs 'temporarily' on very short travel chains through the entire winter and the dog has maybe a foot of movement room whilst it hops back and forth across the long gangline chain.

Vets are supposed to recommend that suitably insulated kennels are used but there are no guidelines as to what this means so most farms get away with using simple tongue and groove or plywood kennels which are quick and inexpensive to make and provide only marginal insulation from wind and pretty much no insulation from the cold. When farms do not comply with the minimum standards the vets are checking against, all the vets can really do is to issue a warning that things should change in order to comply - but they don't really have time to follow up to effect change and there is no common agreement amongst the vets, at that point, as to what they should do.

### **What is the farm's general approach to treating dogs?**

When it comes to vaccination policies, deworming strategies and having the dogs physically examined by vets, the vets have no right to comment. Even some of the 'best' sled dog kennels think that keeping up to date with vaccinations is an unnecessary expense. Similarly, many farms seldom deworm their dogs or take them to the vet for checks.

Our farm, conversely, is known by the area vets as the lump and bump farm since they are amused by the size of the lumps we find in our weekly dog checks. Clearly checking and removing a pea sized lump is better for the dog than it being brought to the vet when the lump is already the size of a golf or tennis ball. Without regular handling, however, it is hard for other farms to find these lumps, particularly outside of the running season.

Many kennels also think that it is only worth getting a dog operated if it is either an exceptionally good dog or they are sure that the course of treatment will be less than an arbitrary expense cap. We often hear of €200 as being the upper limit that owners are willing to spend on a dog. More than that and for most dogs it is more economically sensible, in a farm setting, to kill them.

Find more information about our farm's philosophy with respect to dog health and welfare, [here](#).

### **Ask about the end of life plan for the working dogs**

In the majority of farms, dogs are put down as soon as their useful life is over. Hetta Huskies, however, (and about five or six other farms, in total, that we know of), has a **no cull** policy! Of course, if the rest of the dogs will be put in jeopardy because of the end of life expenses of the retired dogs, then the farms have to take this into consideration. But in most cases, farms are breeding regularly so as to be able to keep the dogs in an optimal age bracket.

Farms can legally shoot their own dogs so long as the person using the gun is capable of doing so - and those that breed ten to 20 pups annually and kill off a corresponding number of older dogs each year, tend to choose this option for end of life plan rather than going to the vet since, even though the vet would have to comply, it would still cause them to raise their eyebrows. Clearly it is a cheaper exercise to do in-house. A bullet costs about 30 cents and the cost of a painfree end of life plan at the vet, at least 10 times that. Vets are subject to the will of the owners when it comes to the decision as to when to end a dog's life since the dogs are the owners' property.

Most owners know that clients won't like to hear that the dogs are put down when ill or old and will fudge the truth on this subject, or, indeed, just try to change the subject. However, if kennels claim that they follow this principle but you do not see many older dogs hanging out there, it is probably not true apart from, maybe, for a token one or two.

The two dogs in the image below run (a small bit) in training season and then as soon as the clients come, they decide it is time for a holiday. In their defence, Petteri on the left has a mild form of epilepsy and Hamppu has a dodgy heart so we try not to push them to do more than they want. And they don't seem to want to run with clients at all so in the season we switch them into a retired dog category and just make sure that they go for regular walks. On most farms, these dogs would no longer be alive. However Petteri is one of the very few dogs whose ongoing existence is thankfully sponsored by one of our returning multiday clients and Hamppu is just waiting for his forever home since one of our old guides has offered to take him when she has settled down (it has just taken four years of waiting so far, but we are patient and hopeful and so is Hamppu!). We have many other dogs who don't run for whatever reason and the majority are on the adopt / sponsor list and meantime hangout eating and training with the other dogs to the limits of their capabilities.

We have large running fences for our old dogs to wander around in and enjoy time in, together. Indeed most of the older dogs live permanently in these large cages since they are less likely to fight or try to escape in their later years and enjoy the company of the others. When they look like they are nearing the end of their time, they are

brought into the house for some comfy months on the sofa and beds. Essentially, our sled dogs are pretty lucky that they are on our farm.

Learn more about our oldies and other dogs which would very much enjoy moving sooner rather than later to a soft dog bed and sofa in a forever home, [here](#). And, if you like our no-kill policy and want to support one of the oldies whilst they are still with us, please check out our sponsorship in situ option for the non-running dogs, (as well as for working dogs and pups), [here](#).

We also keep the puppies we breed rather than trying to use them as a revenue generator because they are a valuable part of our family! Each pup is given the opportunity to run and pull. However, if we recognize that a puppy simply doesn't want to be a sled dog, as much as we hate to part with them - we put them up for adoption just as we do our retired huskies. Thus, they can continue their lives as very rambunctious and much loved house pets - generally with former guides!

You may be surprised that some of the farms (see below) still follow old school practices and breed and kill off unwanted puppies (both on purpose and by accident) nearly every year.

#### **What systems do they have for monitoring the health and wellbeing of their dogs?**

Few farms do regular checks of their dogs, like we do. Most are simply reactive to issues. We are also, we believe, fairly unique in the level of information / data about our dogs which we keep accessible at our fingertips.

Few farms have developed good systems for keeping track of everything from medicine use to the full medical histories of each and every dog as well as their vaccination and deworming schedules etc etc but some at least keep current lists against which medications are given.

You can ask at what stage of record keeping your farm is at and this will tell you quite a bit about how detailed they are, in the care of their dogs.

Surprisingly, some of the most respected kennels even consider antibiotics 'evil' (whereas we believe that their cautious and well thought-out use is almost unavoidable). We medicate slightly less than the vets might designate, because we are a) cautious about over-use of antibiotics and, with so many dogs in our care, we believe that we have a wider responsibility than normal about the frequency with which we use this precious commodity and we understand the global risk of their overuse and b) we have a lot of alternative care knowledge including the use of natural remedies like spruce sap and honey-based ointments and we are willing to spend the time, if need be, on flushing wounds to stimulate healing that vets can't necessarily trust pet owners to commit to.

When we hear other owners in the industry talking about antibiotics and pain medication being evil, we are never really sure if they believe this or if they are just wanting an excuse to reduce costs.

You can actually tell quite a lot about how the dogs have been looked after by how scarred the dogs are since wounds that have been allowed to heal without care and attention leave fairly large scars and a lot of farms have a lot of dogs with scars on their faces and legs from fight wounds which have not been well attended to.

#### **Find more information about our farm's philosophy with respect to systematic record keeping [here](#).**

#### **What should I expect a well maintained kennel facility to look like?**

- What type of housing is provided for the huskies and is it clean and dry or in shambles and filth?
- Are there wires sticking out of cages and kennels and are there dirty bowls lying around everywhere or is the farm environment clean and orderly and the kennels well insulated?
- What kind of insulation do they use? How clean is the kennel?
- (If there is a noticeable amount of poo lying around then they are simply not cleaning the yard often enough). We scrub puppy cages three to five times per day and we poop all other circles and cages at least twice per day. If we did not, we would soon not want to be petting our dogs or handling their bowls and our clothes would not just smell of outdoor dog but also of poop.
- What condition are the bowls in? Are they free of excrement, urine, algae etc? Are the dogs fed on the ground or in bowl holders?

- Find more information about our farm, its layout, choice of cages AND circles, the equipment we use and how we maintain it, etc, [here](#).
- Is there evidence that any effort is made for the mental wellbeing of the dogs outside of basic safari training?

Some smaller farms train their dogs to have fun on agility obstacles but we rarely see this on the bigger farms and our self-made GEE HAW maze is arguably unique!

**Look also at the dogs when you visit.**

If you notice that there are very few sick or recuperating or old dogs on a farm - or, indeed, if you go to a farm more than once and don't recognise many dogs from before - it might just be that the sick are considered too much trouble to keep around and that there is a very high turnover of animals.

If you also see dogs that pull 100% of the time, never fight and never chew harnesses, you need to wonder if the owners are exceptional in their ability to train their animals (since we, for instance, definitely have some dogs that are lazier than others and will quit pulling hard on the longer trails and we also have one or two dogs, including one rescue, that still has what we consider an unacceptable / unpredictable level of aggression - or do they just get rid of all of those which do not meet specific standards. That does, of course, make life easier for the farm since it is then far easier to manage the group of dogs since you don't need to pander to any individual specific training or behavioural needs.

**What is the general appearance of their dogs?**

Are they clean or dirty? Are they well groomed? Is their fur soft and healthy looking? Are they too skinny? Too fat? Scarred?

Check out images and information about all of our dogs, [here](#).

**Ask them, also, what their feeding program is..**

The very best farms have a detailed feeding program which meets the needs of individual dogs. The worst simply throw food into cages and onto the ground and the dogs within the cages compete for it on a fairly hit and miss basis and fights can ensue.

Our dogs' weight is checked weekly and appropriate portion sizes for bigger and smaller dogs and those with anomalous metabolisms all calculated and adjusted weekly in response to the differing needs of the kilometers being run or the ambient temperature.

Sled dogs burn anywhere from 1000 to 7000 calories per day, sometimes even more! Each dog is as different as each human. Like people, dogs cannot all eat the same portions and maintain a healthy weight. Some need to eat more than others and some, less.

Whilst all of the dogs in good kennels might look lean compared to pampered house pets, (they should be, after all, conditioned athletes) there is a big difference between athletic and skinny - and dogs that are allowed to be overweight in a sled dog farm are at as much risk as those that are too skinny.

Even for house pets vet's often recommend that you should be able to feel the last 2 ribs and hip bones but not see them.

Clearly you can see the ribs of some people no matter what they eat and it will be the same for a handful of dogs on any farm. But if you know what a healthy dog should look like, you can take these considerations into the mix and get an instant and fairly reliable picture of how much effort is put into good nutrition for the dogs.

Sled dogs are supposed to be fit, not skinny or looking like walking skeletons.

In the sprint racing industry, the sled dogs are mixed with a high percentage of German Short Haired Pointer and Greyhound to increase the speed of the dog. Generally, dogs that are full time racers are kept lighter framed to ensure that they can maintain their speed - just like marathon runners - but remember that they only pull one person at a time and light sleds.

Touring sled dogs travel mid to long distances whilst pulling much more weight and therefore they have to be very well trained, muscularly fit and of sufficient weight to guarantee their and your safety on the trails. If the general appearance of the sled dogs is skinny or bony, it is cause for concern.

How much attention do they actually pay to the food that they are feeding? What do the dog poos look like? (Liquid diarrhoea or solid and firm?).

Every week, we examine and consider the weight of each and every dog and think about whether the weight on the farm as a whole is also increasing or decreasing or staying constant. We then decide whether we need to raise or lower, on average, the feeding portions, to maintain a stable weight and, after that, we assign categories (fat, normal big dog, normal smaller dog, and skinny) to each dog. Some dogs are constantly in the skinny and fat categories because of their metabolisms and some enter these categories fairly randomly but essentially each dog has a feeding plan specific to their needs which is monitored and adjusted weekly.

Learn more about our nutrition plan [here](#).

We also have systems in place which ensure that the feeding itself is carried out with optimal efficiency since we want the dogs to be in a heightened state of anticipation about their feed for as little time as possible since that is when cage fights, for instance, are most likely to happen. Hence our farm layout has been designed with this (and the efficiency with which we can prepare the dogs to run), in mind.

#### **Ask about their breeding policy**

Most people, if they understood what is considered the norm in the industry, might be a little uncomfortable to find out what breeding policies are considered acceptable.

Many old school mushers, for instance, still believe that you should breed c. 20 new pups per year so as to enable you to kill off any of the adult dogs that are old, slow, needing greater care, chewers of harnesses, harder to handle etc. Some breed both to replenish their own stock (which they want to keep in an optimal age bracket) and to sell and some of the most respected of these will look at their one year old pups, keep the best, sell any that make a minimum weight and are fairly good but that they don't need and kill the rest (so that they don't reduce the quality of their name as breeders). They won't even give these pups away for fear that any that were sub so-called-optimal weight or performance would reflect badly on their name and standing in the industry!

In their world, it is quite literally a tough old world. Don't necessarily, therefore, fall for the 'I have 25 years of experience'. **They might just be 25 years out of date!**

Some kennels breed exponentially simply because they are not organised enough not to. When there is no regulation of breeding for whatever reason (cages are not enclosed, intact males and females are together in cages, etc etc), accidental pregnancies definitely follow and breed lineages are lost since no-one knows who the sire of the pups is. In-breeding is also common in mismanaged kennels since the dogs don't understand to respect family relationships like father / daughter breeding. Most worryingly, unplanned litters increase the kennel population and therefore costs and result in increased culling or lower standards of care overall. The number of dogs you have should be carefully regulated to match the amount of business you have, or you simply won't be able to feed them all! Planning for pups is therefore crucial to avoid overpopulation and also, of course, to ensure the proper care of the dam during pregnancy.

When we took over the running of the other Enontekio farm which is owned by a large UK company in 2010, we were horrified to discover, as the initial weeks went by, that more and more of the females were pregnant. In total, about 16 bitches were carrying litters which were too late to terminate. No-one had any idea who the fathers were, since the dogs could indiscriminately move between cages through holes at ground level or over the tops where there was no ceiling. Apparently the company had instructed the previous manager to breed as much as possible, and she had little choice but to do otherwise, anyway, because of the state of the cages which she couldn't get either sufficient help or resources from them, to fix. Females in heat were put out, when it was spotted, to be the plaything of a big mastif who would mate with them but keep other dogs away, and then they would be aborted. But many slipped through the gap. I believe we found something like 12 pregnant bitches in that first season - enough to start a whole new farm if they had had proper nutrition and standard litter sizes. Luckily (in some ways) only 7 went to full term and most resulted in just two to four pups per litter rather than the 7 per litter which seems to be the average on our farm!

An unfortunate additional side effect was that we often didn't notice that the females were pregnant until it was too late to ensure the kind of good nutrition, rest, pre-pregnancy deworming procedures etc they and the pups would have needed for a safe delivery. Some moms sadly even gave birth outside (which is common practice in many kennels, even in -30C but is considered totally inappropriate in ours). The dogs were so very unsocialised when we started there that they would cower at the very backs of their kennels and we had to check each and every kennel daily just in case there was an additional surprise waiting for us from a birthing overnight!

And trying to find safe, warm space for the moms and pups to live in, post birth, was pretty much impossible. This kind of management is by no means responsible. All we can hope, now that we are no longer running it and it has gone back to old school management, is that the facilities we put in place for the dogs will stand them in good stead for a while.

**TIP:**

An easy way of gauging the owner's breeding vs old age philosophy without raising suspicions from your questions is to ask about the number of pups that they breed each year since no kennel can breed exponentially without very quickly bursting at its seams.

Learn more about our own breeding policy and history [here](#) and check out the images from all of our litters of pups to date, [here](#). Essentially, we manage our kennel in a responsible, humane, safe and sustainable manner with consideration given to the number of huskies we have and with thought for their end of life care. We never have more dogs than we believe that we can adequately and expertly care for.

What type of training do the dogs receive and is this only in the lead up to the winter season or are they handled and trained through the year?

The degree to which the dogs are socialised, or not, links back to the number of workers the kennel has throughout the year as well as to whether or not the kennel is open to the public year-round.

One of the ways in which we work on reducing the shyness of the rescue dogs over time is that we encourage even those guests visiting in big groups to buy dog treats from us so that when they approach some of our shy rescue dogs, they do so with something in their hands which the dogs want.

We also have a comprehensive and very systemised training scheme (and health-care and grooming etc scheme) designed for the dogs which takes them through the year so that they are all handled and trained regularly. Hence all but our oldest rescues (who are hard to turn around) are more responsive to basic obedience commands than the average pet and all of the dogs over a year are pretty good with the running commands. etc. Learn more about our training programme through the year, [here](#).

**Further Notes**

There is a lot of information on the net about the ecological and economical impact of sleddog sports, for example, [here](#) as well as about responsible dog breeding, training and ownership, for example [here](#).

However, as with all things in life, there are some people who take extreme positions on both sides of the fence. There are dog owners who have been in the industry for 25 or 30 years and don't see a need to change their old school practices (like some of those mentioned above). Conversely, there are animal rights activists who believe that sleddog sports should be totally banned, without question, who simply don't understand how much the dogs love it. And then there are advocates who are also maybe also a little on the extreme side and would like every sled dog to share your bed in better conditions than most children.

Somewhere in the middle probably lies a reasonable balance where the dogs are treated as living animals with the rights which should come from their intelligence, capacity to love and to feel cared for or neglected as well as to feel pain, sorry and joy / excitement. I believe that we SHOULD all feel a responsibility towards the care of these amazing athletes that we have decided to bring into the world but animal rights extremists who want the sport totally banned are maybe a little too removed from the sport to be judging so vocally. Indeed, any reservations anyone might have about how much the dogs love to run is immediately answered as soon as you stand on the start line of a well-managed farm and watch the joy with which the dogs are pulling into their harness, literally jumping to go.

So. Send a message to the old school guys in the business and help to shape the future of sleddog farms by demanding (by where you choose to spend your money) that they 'get with the times' and set standards that value the dogs and treat them as loving and loyal animals rather than as commodities. And don't believe the advocates who say that all sleddogs are badly treated. One look at ours and you will see that they love it!

Good luck in your sleddog mushing experience. May you have the good fortune to experience the joy of running sleddogs with a reputable kennel. And ideally, of course, we hope that you have your (hopefully life-changing and truly memorable) sled-dog experience with us!

### **Ethical Dog Care**

Taking good care of dogs is a round-the-clock deal. Whilst many farms have people working just on feeding and pooping in the summer months, our dogs are checked regularly for heat 3 times per week and any medical issues, thoroughly, once per week.

That way, we can, for instance, keep a close eye on any lumps and bumps and see if they are getting bigger and warrant treatment quickly or not (the vet even calls us the lump and bump farm since we discover them at the stage when most normal dog owners, let alone sleddog farm owners, would not even notice them). We can also be sure that they are also free of fleas or mites (and, if any develop any due to the neighbouring wild animals), then we can quickly quarantine them and prevent their spread to the rest of the pack.

And we can watch for any issues with our eyes. For instance one of our dogs (and one of those rescued from Santa Safari's farm) has Panus and needs regular treatment daily to keep this potentially progressive eye disease at bay. We believe that good dog care is proactive vs reactive and that requires regular and thorough checking irrespective of how many mosquitos are flying around our ears or how cold the temperature is for bare hands doing the checking!

On the back of the EU project, we set up Lapland's association for sled dog entrepreneurs (Pasi is the chairman) with the aim being to share best practices and develop a common voice for this segment of the tourism market. It is only through communication between the providers that we will gain a unified voice as one of the leading attractions to tourists. Without a voice, it will be a struggle for each individual company to get the right to operate their products as they need to be able to do, to survive and to generate a stable, approved network for local husky people and visitors who come with their own huskies to explore the region. Another target for the association is the development of a code of conduct / certification scheme for sled dog owners which should, in turn, raise the animal welfare standards across this important tourism sector. We support, in general, the development of voluntary regulatory arrangements and training programmes that are available to tourism operators that would help companies contribute to the economic prosperity and environmental well-being of the local communities and environment in which they operate.

We believe that the kind of standards we set in all areas of our business will be the expected norm rather than the exception in the years to come and we want to lead the way. We believe that there is definitely a more environmentally conscious international traveller out there who would love the type of wilderness location, outdoor products and natural lifestyle holiday that the tourists who come here enjoy.

### **Addressing Seasonal Challenges**

Bellies and ears are particularly susceptible to fly bites in summer and nipples, and testicles, to frostbite in winter. Those that look like they are developing problems in this area are checked three times per week (ie in addition to the standard weekly medical check) and, if the balance tips and they are having too hard a time outdoors, they are taken into the main house for a break from the hostile Arctic element.

A little bit unusually we also have two anti-mosquito magnets in the farmhouse / sick dog area and two specifically for the dogs, on the farm. We think that this is worth the 2000€ investment for the health and well-being of both guides and dogs.

### **Nails and Feet**

Nails and the feet in general are given a lot of attention since clearly if they have sore feet or their nails are too long, that will lead to issues all over. Hence, the dogs get a manicure/pedicure session at least once per month.

### **Teeth**

We also pay a lot of attention to their teeth since we want them to be able to eat well throughout their lives. We know the 'worst' candidates w.r.t. teeth and they are looked at regularly but all of the dogs get a dental hygiene session at least once per month.

### **Meeting Individual Training Needs**

All dogs are also part of a comprehensive training program through the year, the targets for which, change with the season and are not only specific to each dog's stage of development and needs but also take into consideration what motivates them and what we think that their potential might be.

### **Cuddle, Grooming and Massage Time**

Of course, we also simply spend time with them, cuddling, plucking hair or grooming and playing with them - both individually and in groups within our two running fences, and this time is definitely a highlight of the day for dogs and guides alike. Our fluffier dogs are groomed twice per week to prevent matting and our old dogs get regular massages to keep their joints moving fluidly - particularly in winter.

### **Safe Haven for Retirees..**

Dogs like Petteri and Hamppu, pictured here, are pretty lucky to live on our farm. They decided after their first year that they didn't enjoy running with clients. At all. In their specific cases, they have some excuse (Petteri is epileptic and Hamppu has a bad heart) but other dogs are just not ready or too shy to run with clients and we don't 'get rid of them' just because they cannot earn their keep. Similarly, we don't just get rid of old dogs once they have served their purpose.

Rather, we try to stimulate them and to keep them as fit and healthy as they can be by running them in training season for as long as they are able and putting all of them on a weekly walking program year-round. Non-runners are also put alongside oldies and pups on the 'client walking target list'. We specifically have the first night of our multiday safaris stay on our farm so that clients have the chance to be hands-on with the walking and social interaction of this group of dogs and it is great fun all round.

Of course, if we can find good homes for the old dogs or those who are just not suitable for working sleddogs, then we do. A few of the others, like Petteri, are thankfully sponsored (he, by a Swiss family who has been on safari with us twice) but we bear the cost for all of the rest of those living here in effective retirement. This is pretty unusual in the sleddog industry in which, in many cases, the dogs are considered products which have to very much justify their continued existence. We believe, however, that if you bring a dog into the world, you have a responsibility to either care for it or find it another loving home, even if it isn't quite perfect for you.

### **A musher's response to PETA's continuous anti-sleddog campaigns**

In November 2016, it became apparent that there was to be yet another 'expose' on conditions in sleddog farms - primarily linking back to known controversies and abuses in previous cases over the years (eg in Whistler). The expose this time is materialism through an anti-sleddog film which is ironically to be released in December at the Whistler Film Festival. It was apparently filmed under false pretences on a number of premises and at a number of races and has the backing of PETA and other extremist animal rights campaigners. To me, whilst it is good, on one hand, that people within the community are forced to talk as a result, it is not good if the ultimate outcome is that it puts sleddogs themselves in jeopardy. And that is the fear with campaigns like the anti-elephant riding / swimming with dolphins ones if applied to sleddogs.

Anna McCormack (Sustainability Coordinator): 7th June 2022

