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Agenda Item 12: Facilitation Programmes

PET ON BOARD: ENHANCING ANIMAL WELFARE

(Presented by Italy)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal welfare has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental value within legal and social frameworks, closely tied to the acknowledgement of pets as sentient beings. Italian legislation now recognizes pets as family members, making their welfare a fundamental right. Actually, in air transport, medium and large animals are allowed to travel in cargo holds, which are designed to minimize the risks for their safety and wellbeing. The Italian Civil Aviation Authority has pioneered guidelines for a gradual extension of in-cabin transport beyond the 8 kg limit. ITA Airways was the first Italian airline to embrace this vision, conducting demonstration flights to test feasibility, safety procedures, and passenger acceptance. Italy's aim is to align aviation standards with evolving social dynamics, ensuring passenger compatibility, avoiding risks linked to cargo transport, and moving beyond a safety-only paradigm. This approach promotes a more inclusive, humane, and harmonized travel experience at the global level

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goals <i>Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible, and Reliable Mobility for All; Every Flight Is Safe and Secure</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Not Applicable
<i>References:</i>	Annex 9 — <i>Facilitation</i> Annex 8 — <i>Airworthiness of Aircraft</i> Annex 6 — <i>Operation of Aircraft</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The welfare of animals, increasingly recognized as a core principle and linked to their status as sentient beings, has gained prominence in both legal and social frameworks. At the European level, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) formally embedded animal welfare requirements into EU law. More recently, Italy has reinforced this path: the constitutional reform of Article 9 (2022) extended protection to animals, and Law No. 82/2025 established them as direct subjects of criminal protection.

1.2 At the international level, there is still a regulatory lack. ICAO provisions (Doc 9984, *Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities*) are limited to service animals assisting persons with disabilities, leaving broader aspects of animal transport unaddressed. In Europe, however, specific technical requirements set a strict limit of 8 kg for pets traveling in cabin, provided they remain inside a carrier. In addition, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has issued detailed guidelines to support airlines in harmonizing procedures on a global scale.

1.3 Beyond the constraints of existing technical requirements, the ongoing legal evolution highlights a shift towards recognizing pets as integral members of the family unit. In this context, the message from the Italian Minister of Infrastructure and Transport is to explore solutions that balance safety with the needs of pet owners. Italy aims to be the first member state worldwide to promote their accommodation in air transport cabins, alongside owners. Specific high-level guidelines have been issued by the Italian Civil Aviation Authority to encourage airlines to develop procedures enabling the gradual inclusion of larger pets on board, while ensuring passenger compatibility, preventing conflicts, and safeguarding operational safety and facilitation principles.

2. RATIONALE FOR EXPANDING IN-CABIN PET TRASPORTATION

2.1 To date, pet transport in aviation has largely depended on airline policies, with practices generally falling into three categories: small pets are admitted in the cabin if placed in suitable carriers; medium and large pets are transported as checked baggage in pressurized and heated cargo holds; and guide or assistance dogs are admitted in the cabin without restrictions to support passengers with disabilities.

2.2 Although cargo holds are designed to ensure safe conditions, transporting larger pets in this way may cause welfare concerns under certain circumstances. Documented cases, though statistically rare, include acute stress, hypothermia, trauma, equipment malfunctions, and in some instance's fatalities. Each of these incidents, while uncommon, could represent a tragedy for the animal and its family. As envisaged by the principles enshrined in the Italian Constitution, this underlines the opportunity to align aviation standards with evolving social dynamics and thus recognizing pets as family members in modern air travel.

2.3 Building on the positive experience with assistance dogs, which has demonstrated benefits for both passengers and animals under well-defined safety and hygiene conditions, airlines and regulators can progressively extend similar practices and policies, initially focusing on larger dogs, as a first step towards broader in-cabin pet transport.

3. HIGH LEVEL GUIDELINES FOR IN-CABIN TRANSPORT OF LARGER PETS

3.1 Italy's guidelines establish a progressive framework to ensure safe and compatible in-cabin transport of large and medium pets. They open the way to more flexible solutions, which include

containment in carriers, as well as procedures inspired by the assistance dog model for larger animals. To safeguard passenger well-being, the guidelines also address allergy and phobia concerns through the use of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, clear passenger information, and the creation of buffer zones. This measure builds on the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, when such systems proved effective in preventing contagion and promoting a healthier cabin environment.

3.2 More specifically, airlines are encouraged to provide clear information, safeguard the health and well-being of all on board through appropriate measures, apply advanced booking or approval systems with adapted handling procedures, define the maximum number of pets per cabin, and ensure that pet containment and evacuation procedures remain effective so as to preserve the duties and safety of all passengers and crew members. Where changes to the passenger cabin layout are required to accommodate pets, such changes should be subject to prior safety approval.

4. ITALY'S PATH

4.1 The implementation of Italy's high-level policies is based on a step-by-step approach, ensuring that each phase is verified before moving forward. This progressive method allows the gradual introduction of measures, enabling regulators and airlines to test compatibility, refine procedures, and guarantee that operational safety and passenger well-being remain fully safeguarded.

4.2 In 2024, ENAC, the Italian Civil Aviation Authority, authorized ITA Airways to extend the in-cabin weight limit for pets from 8 kg to 10 kg, marking an initial step towards a more flexible and welfare-oriented regulatory approach.

4.3 Building on this development, in 2025 demonstration flights were conducted with ENAC's approval, allowing medium- and large-sized dogs to travel in the cabin under controlled conditions. These trials, informed by the existing experience with assistance dogs, served to test operational measures, evaluate passenger compatibility, and ensure that safety procedures remained robust.

4.4 The next step envisaged by the Italian system is to gradually introduce the option of in-cabin travel for pets exceeding current size and weight limits. This approach reflects a broader commitment to animal welfare in air transport, moving beyond a safety-only perspective and recognizing the social role of pets as integral members of families. Italy aims to position itself as the first Member State to adopt this progressive and cutting-edge framework, while maintaining strict attention to passenger health, operational safety, and overall compatibility on board.

5. EXPERIENCE AND STRATEGY

5.1 ITA Airways was the first Italian airline to activate a pilot project for the implementation of the new resolution on pets in cabin. The objective was to assess passenger compatibility, validate safety measures, and promote animal welfare in line with evolving social expectations.

5.2 Demonstration flights were conducted to allow pets up to 20 kg to travel in the cabin without a carrier, following arrangements similar to those for assistance dogs. These trials, carried out within a framework of progressive implementation, provided evidence on passenger interaction, animal behaviour, and comfort on board, while testing the effectiveness of safety and operational procedures.

5.3 Specific safeguards were applied. Requirements included veterinary certification of health and behaviour issued within seven days of departure, the signing of an indemnity form by the owner, and a limit on the number of animals per flight. The use of a muzzle was mandatory for the entire duration of the demonstration flights, with particular emphasis during boarding and disembarkation. Pets also had to be restrained with a harness and seat-belt attachment.

5.4 Ground and cabin procedures were tested in parallel. Staff received dedicated training for check-in, boarding, and disembarkation. On board, passengers accompanied by pets were required to purchase a full row of seats, with the animal placed on the floor near the window, and protective flooring was installed to safeguard aircraft integrity.

5.5 The demonstration provided Italy with a practical basis for gradually expanding in-cabin pet transport. The results confirmed that compatibility with passengers and safety requirements can be preserved while improving service quality and animal welfare.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Italian experience confirms that accommodating pets in the cabin is feasible when approached through gradual implementation and demonstration flights. Results show that passenger compatibility can be effectively managed, operational safety preserved, and animal welfare enhanced. This cultural and regulatory evolution reflects the recognition of pet as family member and requires updating aviation practices to align with evolving social expectations.

6.2 Member States and relevant stakeholders, including aircraft manufacturers, air operators, and aerodrome operators, are encouraged to:

- recognize the importance of animal welfare in air transport, moving beyond the traditional treatment of pets (passenger emotional or therapy animals) as baggage;
- adopt flexible operational models that uphold safety while supporting more inclusive approaches to pet transportation;
- implement passenger compatibility assessments to minimize potential conflicts and enhance overall service quality; and
- review and, where appropriate, update existing standards and technical regulations to reflect evolving societal expectations and travel patterns.

6.3 The Assembly is invited to take note of this information paper and to acknowledge the lack in existing standards for this matter, with a view to its possible consideration for future actions in the ICAO framework.