

What is Animal Law

Vanessa Gerritsen

General definition

Generally speaking, we can say that animal law is the field of law that seeks to govern the interactions between human and nonhuman animals. In animal law we ask fundamental questions about the nature of a legal right or interest, how laws create or entrench (power) imbalances, and – most importantly – how those imbalances impact animals.

Where do we find animal law?

Animal law is rooted in the written law and in the practical application of statutes, regulations, and case law.

What legal fields does animal law pertain to?

An animal lawyer must have expertise on **animal welfare provisions** throughout the entire legal system:

- Public law – administrative measures
- Criminal law – animal cruelty and other infringements
- Private law – animals are not things
- Legislation on animal testing
- Hunting and fishing legislation
- Constitution

An animal lawyer must also have expertise on regulations that **indirectly relate to animal welfare**, again throughout the entire legal system:

- Public law – regulations concerning human and animal safety
- Criminal law – damage to property
- Private law – claims for compensation
- Forestry sector
- Agricultural sector
- Fundamental rights – e.g. religious rights, property rights, economic freedom

Animal law in the narrower sense – animal welfare law

The aim is to expand the scope of animal welfare law within animal law. It must not be left to the industries that profit from animal exploitation to influence, commission, and/or fund research on animal welfare issues, particularly when it comes to the legal framework governing the treatment of animals. To date, the animal use industries have been doing just that and have been making sure that research on animal welfare result in mere minimum legal standards for the animals. It is therefore extremely important that, within the framework of the interpretation of the research on animal welfare, the animals are fully

taken into account and that animal welfare lawyers exert greater influence and pressure at a factual, scientific and professional level.

Interaction with other academic fields

The field of animal law also explores other areas, such as natural science, political science, and philosophy.

Different fields of work:

Animal law can encompass different fields of work:

- Political level: develop legal bases for strict animal welfare law and its consistent enforcements
- Public level: work towards raising awareness among the public through information and education about facts and legislation
- Academic level: promoting and supporting law students, i.e. future lawyers

Broad definition:

It is important to keep the interpretation of the concept of animal law as broad and flexible as possible so as not to cement its definition and run the risk of leaving out areas that might prove important and a necessary addition to the curriculum of animal law students and the work of animal lawyers in the future.