

## **VETERINARY IRELAND POLICY DOCUMENT ON WELFARE OF ANIMALS AT TIME OF SLAUGHTER**

### **COMPILED BY THE ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE OF VETERINARY IRELAND**

This document deals with the welfare problems encountered during the slaughter of animals and during the transportation of animals to and their preparation for slaughter.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Veterinary profession is involved in the slaughter of animals both in the context of providing health care at the place of production and in supervision at slaughter houses. In both contexts it has a role to play in ensuring animal welfare.

Perceptions of these problems can vary between the extremes of, on the one hand, regarding animals merely as raw material for the food industry to be treated in any fashion as long as the profitability of the product is not compromised, and on the other seeing them as living organisms with the same rights as human beings. Our approach should accept that farm animals have evolved to supply the demand for food for humans but in the production and supply of that food they must be treated without avoidable pain or suffering. No less than any other, the animal about to be slaughtered is entitled to the five basic freedoms;

1. Freedom from thirst and hunger;
2. Freedom from discomfort;
3. Freedom from pain injury and disease;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour and
5. Freedom from fear and distress.

The steps in the slaughter process which must concern us are,

- (a) transport to place of slaughter,
  - (b) treatment during lairaging,
  - (c) restraint during slaughter,
- and
- (d) stunning and slaughter.

(a) The transportation of animals will be the subject of another document. However it should be noted that many of the commercial considerations which may influence transporters to observe humane practices when animals are being transported for purposes of breeding or production may be absent when the animals are being transported to slaughter. Legislation (**1995**) requires the owner or person in charge of animals to 'ensure that the animals are spared any avoidable excitement pain or suffering during movement'. It also requires that persons engaged in the movement of animals have the knowledge and skills necessary and that, when in the opinion of the authorised officer (which includes the veterinary officer at the place of slaughter) these are absent, training must be provided for the persons concerned. Animals being moved for emergency slaughter must be fit to be so moved without being subjected to pain or suffering.

(b) The handling of animals in the lairage are subject to similar requirements as transport. Similar action should be taken. Adequate drinking water must be available at all times and, where the animals are being held for a long time, adequate food must be provided. Beating with sticks and excessive use of electric goads is prohibited. Overcrowding and the penning together of incompatible animals must be avoided. It is important that, during both transport and lairage, animals are segregated when there is a possibility that they could cause injury one another.

### **The Slaughter Of Animals Without Prior Stunning is Unacceptable and Should Be Prohibited.**

**Adopted by the National Council of Veterinary Ireland, 24.6.04**

(c) All animals must be restrained prior to stunning. The restraint must avoid fear, discomfort or pain to the animal. It is required that animals cannot see any carcass, blood or offal prior to stunning. There must be no avoidable delay between restraint and stunning.

(d) All persons engaged in stunning must hold a licence issued under (1935). Proper stunning equipment, in good working order and regularly serviced must be used. An alternative method of stunning must be readily available in the event of failure of the original instrument. In the case of captive bolt stunning a second pistol, also serviced and maintained, must be available. Where electrical stunning or Carbon Dioxide is used a captive bolt pistol should be held in reserve. We believe **that the slaughter of animals without prior stunning is unacceptable and should be prohibited.** We accept, however, that National and European law, in order to accommodate the beliefs of certain religious groups, provide for derogations from the requirement for prior stunning to accommodate these groups. In these circumstances the minimum requirements listed in the annex to the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe position paper (FVE/02/104) must be applied. (see annex)

Veterinarians should strictly enforce the legislative requirements concerning welfare at time of slaughter. The private practitioner in the field must ensure that injured animals are not moved to slaughter where such movement would cause pain or discomfort. A certificate of fitness for slaughter must include a statement that this is the case. Veterinary personnel at the slaughterhouse must ensure that such certification accompanies all such animals.

Where the welfare requirements of the regulations are not being observed at any stage of the slaughter process, the veterinary personnel should take appropriate action. Where the offence is serious or persistent prosecution must be considered.

Veterinary Ireland should enter into discussions with appropriate bodies such as farming organisations, organisations representing the meat trade, the Department of Agriculture and educational bodies to ensure that courses for providing the training required by the regulations are provided as soon as possible. Legislation should be reviewed to accommodate any recommendations of this document not already required.

The following legislation is referred to in this document.

(1935) Slaughter of Animals Act, 1935

(1995) European Communities (Protection of Animals at Time of Slaughter) Regulations, 1995.

## **The Slaughter Of Animals Without Prior Stunning is Unacceptable and Should Be Prohibited.**

**Adopted by the National Council of Veterinary Ireland, 24.6.04**

## ANNEX

Minimum requirements where derogation from prior stunning is allowed for religious reasons.

- Slaughterhouses should be specifically approved for this purpose and the approval should be subject to suitable equipment being available.
- Slaughtering outside a licensed slaughterhouse must not be allowed. No exceptions shall be allowed.
- Staff involved at the point of slaughter must be specifically trained for the purpose. This training must include technical aspects, to be decided by the competent authority, in addition to any training given by religious authorities. It should include an examination and continuous improvement of the slaughterers. The initial training should be carried out on stunned or dead animals.
- The slaughtering process must be in the permanent presence of a veterinarian who has the authority and obligation to intervene whenever necessary.
- Animals for ritual slaughter must be pre-selected. Only animals destined for the consumption of the religious community concerned should be subject to the ritual.
- The farmer who produced the animal must have the right to know how his animal will be slaughtered.
- The “Weinberg” pen must be banned.
- Bovines should not be inverted for the purpose of slaughtering.
- Should slaughtering take place without prior stunning, animals should be stunned immediately following the cut.
- For poultry, the speed of the line must be adapted to guarantee that each animal can be slaughtered manually.
- The knife has to be razor sharp and its length must be at least twice of the width of the neck.
- Animals shall not be restrained until the slaughterman is ready to slaughter them. The cut must then be carried out immediately after restraint and consist of one uninterrupted movement in which both carotid arteries and both jugular veins are cut.
- The wound edges must not come together and the animal must remain in the restrained, upright position, until death ensues.
- The carcass and all products derived from it must be labelled as to clearly indicate the method of slaughter used, including whether or not prior stunning was employed.
- Product imported from third countries should comply with standards identical to those laid down for Europe.

**The Slaughter Of Animals Without Prior Stunning is Unacceptable  
and Should Be Prohibited.**

**Adopted by the National Council of Veterinary Ireland, 24.6.04**