



**VETERINARY IRELAND**

**POLICY DOCUMENT**

**ON**

**WELFARE OF ANIMALS**

**SLAUGHTERED WITHOUT**

**PRIOR STUNNING**

**2014**

**RATIFIED BY**  
**VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL**  
**4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**



## **Veterinary Ireland Policy Document on Welfare of Animals Slaughtered Without Prior Stunning**

### **SUMMARY**

Veterinary Ireland welcomes the introduction by the European Union of the COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. Veterinary Ireland commends the EU on the innovations introduced in the new legislation to increase the safeguards on the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter.

However Veterinary Ireland notes that this legislation continues the EU tradition of allowing for slaughter without prior stunning as prescribed by religious rites, and leaving it to each Member State to legislate as to how religious slaughter should be controlled. Slaughter without stunning causes pain, distress and suffering to the animal, all of which may be avoided by stunning the animal.

As such, Veterinary Ireland supports the statement of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) that “The Slaughter of Animals without Prior Stunning is Unacceptable under Any Circumstances”.

Veterinary Ireland calls on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and local authorities to engage with Muslim and Jewish religious authorities in order to identify methods of stunning that are acceptable to these religious authorities and that will also spare the animals all avoidable pain, distress and suffering and to ensure that these stunning methods are used on all animals slaughtered as prescribed by religious rites.

Veterinary Ireland calls on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to introduce national legislation to ensure the protection of animals slaughtered without prior stunning.

Veterinary Ireland, in conjunction with the FVE, calls on the EU to introduce legislation requiring the labelling of meat to identify if it has come from an animal that was not stunned prior to slaughter.

## Veterinary Ireland Policy on Welfare of Animals Slaughtered Without Prior Stunning



### **POLICY DETAIL**

#### **EU Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009**

Veterinary Ireland welcomes the introduction by the European Union of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing. This Regulation came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. Veterinary Ireland notes the animal welfare principle enshrined in Article 3 of the Regulation: “Animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.” Implementation of this legislation will ensure that animals are treated with care and respect from the time they are admitted to the slaughterhouse until they are killed.

However Veterinary Ireland also notes that the principle enshrined in Article 3 of this Regulation does not extend to the slaughter of animals without prior stunning, as prescribed by religious rites.

Article 4, Paragraph 1 states that animals shall only be killed after stunning but then Article 4, Paragraph 4 goes on to state that Paragraph 1 shall not apply to methods of slaughter prescribed by religious rites, provided slaughter takes place in an approved slaughterhouse. Article 26 states that Member States may adopt national rules aimed at ensuring more extensive protection of animals at the time of killing than those contained in the Regulation in relation to the slaughtering of animals as prescribed by religious rites.

#### **FVE Position Paper on Slaughter of Animals without Prior Stunning**

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 44 veterinary organisations from 38 European countries, representing a total of around 200 000 veterinarians. Veterinary Ireland is a member of FVE.

In 2002, FVE issued its position paper on the “Slaughter of Animals without Prior Stunning”.

[http://www.fve.org/uploads/publications/docs/fve\\_02\\_104\\_slaughter\\_prior\\_stunning.pdf](http://www.fve.org/uploads/publications/docs/fve_02_104_slaughter_prior_stunning.pdf)

This paper clearly sets out the evidence that slaughter without prior stunning causes the animal avoidable pain, distress and suffering, in direct contravention of animal welfare principles. FVE’s position, then and now, is that “the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances”. FVE set out, in an annex to its position paper, its recommended minimum requirements where slaughtering without prior stunning, as prescribed by religious rites, takes place. Veterinary Ireland supports and endorses FVE’s position.

A number of European countries including Norway, Sweden and Denmark, have banned slaughtering without prior stunning. Other European countries e.g. Netherlands and Poland, have introduced national rules to regulate slaughter of animals without prior stunning. Religious authorities in many countries have accepted that certain methods of stunning are in accordance with their religious rites and may be performed on animals prior to ritual slaughter e.g. many Muslim authorities accept head-only electrical stunning of animals prior to ritual slaughter. In a number of Irish slaughterhouses where ritual slaughter of sheep takes place, the sheep are subjected to head-only electrical stunning prior to slaughter.

## **Veterinary Ireland Policy on Welfare of Animals Slaughtered Without Prior Stunning**



**Veterinary Ireland calls on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and local authorities to engage with Muslim and Jewish religious authorities in order to identify methods of stunning that are acceptable to these religious authorities and that will also spare the animals all avoidable pain, distress and suffering and to ensure that these stunning methods are used on all animals slaughtered as prescribed by religious rites.**

**Where it is not possible to identify stunning methods acceptable to Muslim or Jewish religious authorities:**

**Veterinary Ireland calls on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to introduce national rules to ensure the protection of animals slaughtered without prior stunning. These rules must state, at a minimum:**

- The slaughter of animals as prescribed by religious rites, outside an approved slaughterhouse, is prohibited.**
- Slaughterhouses wishing to carry out slaughter according to religious rites must be specifically approved for this purpose by the competent authority, and this approval must be subject to suitable equipment being available.**
- An official veterinarian must be present continuously to observe and supervise the slaughtering process.**
- Only animals destined for consumption by the religious community concerned should be subjected to slaughter without prior stunning.**
- Bovines must not be inverted for the purpose of slaughtering.**
- For poultry, the speed of the line must be adjusted to guarantee that each bird can be slaughtered manually.**
- The knife used for cutting the animal's throat must be razor sharp and its length must be at least twice the width of the animal's neck.**
- Animals must not be restrained until the slaughterman is ready to slaughter them.**
- The throat cut must be carried out immediately after restraint and must consist of one uninterrupted movement in which both carotid and both jugular veins are cut.**
- Animals must be stunned immediately following the cutting of the animal's throat.**
- The wound edges must not come together and the animal must remain in the restrained position until death ensues.**
- All meat derived from animals slaughtered without prior stunning must be clearly labelled as "Produced from an animal that was not stunned prior to slaughter".**



**FVE Position Paper on Slaughter without Stunning and Food Labelling**

The FVE issued a further position paper in 2012 on “Slaughter without Stunning and Food Labelling”.

<http://www.fve.org/uploads/publications/docs/030%20fve%20position%20labeling%20meat%20from%20animals%20slaughtered%20without%20stunning%20final.pdf>

In this paper, the FVE points out that in some member countries, slaughter without stunning is used not as an exception but almost as a general rule resulting in large quantities of meat derived from animals slaughtered without stunning entering the main food chain. Apart from contravening EU legislation and causing avoidable pain, distress and suffering to these animals, this also results in meat from animals which were not stunned prior to slaughter being marketed to EU citizens unaware of the method of slaughter and deprived of making the choice between meat produced by slaughter to high standards of animal welfare and meat produced by slaughter without prior stunning.

The FVE advocates that meat or meat products from ritually slaughtered animals should be clearly labelled to enable all consumers to make an informed choice based on welfare, ethics or personal belief when purchasing such products.

The FVE also points out that its position has nothing to do with the expression of religious belief but with the practice of killing by throat cutting without pre-stunning.

The FVE therefore recommends that labelling should refer to non-stun slaughter rather than a method of religious slaughter.

**Veterinary Ireland supports and endorses FVE’s position on this matter and calls on the EU to introduce legislation requiring the labelling of meat to identify if it has come from an animal that was not stunned prior to slaughter.**

**Veterinary Ireland Policy on Welfare of Animals  
Slaughtered Without Prior Stunning**



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