



VETERINARY IRELAND

POLICY DOCUMENT

ON

WELFARE OF ANIMALS

SLAUGHTERED WITHOUT

PRIOR STUNNING

2019

AS RATIFIED BY
VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL
21st NOVEMBER 2019



Veterinary Ireland Policy Document on
Welfare of Animals Slaughtered Without Prior Stunning
November 2019

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 1st January 2013. 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 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.

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POLICY DETAIL

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. 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”. The FVE is of the opinion that the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances. The 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. Veterinary Ireland supports and endorses FVE’s position.

http://www.fve.org/uploads/publications/docs/fve_02_104_slaughter_prior_stunning.pdf

In 2013, FVE issued its position paper on slaughter without stunning and food labelling. It stated as long as slaughter without stunning is permitted for religious reasons it believes that any meat or meat products from these sources should be clearly labelled to enable all consumers to make an informed choice based on welfare, ethics or personal belief when purchasing such products. FVE feels it is important to differentiate between ‘religious’ and ‘non-stun’ slaughter. Their concern has nothing to do with the expression of religious belief but with the practice of killing by throat cutting without pre-stunning. FVE therefore advocate that labelling should refer to non-stun slaughter rather than a method of religious slaughter

<https://www.fve.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/030-fve-position-labeling-meat-from-animals-slaughtered-without-stunning-final.pdf>

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Given the sincerely held religious beliefs of observant Jews and many Muslims, requiring stunning before slaughter clearly implicates international human rights law on freedom of religion, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

Several European countries do not allow derogations from the general requirement of prior stunning. These include Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Slovenia. Switzerland and Lichtenstein require prior stunning except for poultry. Two of the three regions of Belgium have recently enacted laws requiring prior stunning, which become effective in 2019. Finland requires concurrent sedation; legislation is pending that would require prior stunning. However, the Act allows an exception for religiously slaughtered animals that are sedated *simultaneously* with the start of bloodletting, i.e. it requires that sedation (via bolt pistol or electricity) be applied simultaneously with the fatal cut.

Some countries mandate post-cut stunning, including Austria, Estonia, Greece, and Latvia.

Other European countries permit derogations from the general requirements to allow for religious slaughter. The cases of Cyprus, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Spain illustrate different forms that regulation of ritual slaughter may take, while Poland, (where religious slaughter has at times been prohibited, but is currently legal), offers an interesting history concerning the legality of religious slaughter. In Spain under under 32/2007 on the Care, Exploitation, Transportation and Sacrifice of Animals, religious slaughter without previous stunning is allowed in approved slaughterhouses, provided that such procedure does not violate fundamental rights, public safety, health, and morality protected by law.

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.



CONCLUSION

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

- 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. It must be done so with the quick, uninterrupted movements of a sharp knife.
- 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".

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.



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