

## LEGAL REQUIREMENTS ON STUNNING AND SLAUGHTER IN TWENTY EIGHT COUNTRIES

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### Background

Many people consider that society has a moral responsibility to slaughter animals humanely. In the past different cultures have held different views about what constitutes humane slaughter. There has also been a wide range of practices (Gregory 1989), and the preferred method has in some countries been influenced by religious doctrine.

The standards set for slaughtering animals in slaughterhouses differ according to whether it is an export slaughterhouse, a local abattoir or an unregistered butchers premises. Besides this, there are six factors which have influenced the way legal requirements have developed:

- National statutory requirements have usually been based on society's requirements within the main culture and education of that country, plus advice from the veterinary profession. The requirements have invariably been based on concepts of humane and hygienic slaughter.
- Derogations have been made to allow for religious doctrine or tradition. In this respect, human rights have taken precedence over expectations for animals, but many countries impose minimum standards even for religious methods. Religious slaughter authorities have claimed that they are entitled to this derogation on the grounds that their slaughter methods are humane.
- Collective agreements have been made between nations. They have usually been based on what is thought to be best practice, but in some cases the standards have been influenced by the level of investment in existing stunning systems.
- Requirements have been imposed by overseas nations which import meat from another country.
- Standards have been influenced by practical considerations, including the methods that are presently available
- Sometimes there has been resistance from the meat industry to any form of control or change and this has determined how particular recommendations have been drafted.

### Objective

The aim of this paper was to summarise the most commonly accepted requirements for humane slaughter at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was achieved with a survey of the legal requirements for stunning and slaughter in slaughterhouses. Those legal requirements usually reflect three interests; the interests of the animal and its welfare, those of the meat and livestock industry and the practicalities of doing the job, and meeting the consumers' and society's expectations on the principles that underlie a satisfactory slaughter (Gregory 1998).

The information derived from this survey should be helpful to those countries that wish to introduce or upgrade their legislation, and for helping people decide upon the standards that should be set when killing animals in other situations.

### Methods

Two or three requests for information were sent to each of 57 countries. The aim was to encompass a broad range of the major meat exporting and importing countries, as well as a small sample of countries that were relatively self-sufficient in meat. The specific questions that were asked were:

1. The legal requirements on the methods of slaughter, and whether stunning is part of that requirement.
2. If stunning is required by law, which are the approved methods.
3. Are there different legal requirements for different species, different religions, or different uses of the meat (local consumption or export to another country).
4. A copy of the relevant legislation.

### Results and Discussion

Replies were received from 28 of the 57 countries: Australia, Belgium-Luxembourg, Brazil (São Paulo State), Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. All of the responding countries except for one required stunning before slaughter. However, 23 countries made a clear statement that they did not require stunning before religious slaughter. Only one country specifically prohibited all forms of religious slaughter that did not involve preslaughter stunning. Seventeen countries gave general requirements as to how religious slaughter should be practiced in order to help protect the animals' welfare.

Twenty two of the 28 countries required that the slaughter person must be skilled or trained in the job. Most countries (27) specified the equipment that can be used for stunning animals in slaughterhouses.

Some countries had rules that were unusual and applied specifically to their own countries, and out of interest these are included as follows. In Norway, slaughter without stunning for religious purposes is not permitted, whereas in all other responding countries preslaughter stunning is not required for either Jewish slaughter or Jewish and Islamic slaughter methods. In Australia, however, stunning for religious slaughter is encouraged but not mandatory. In Zimbabwe, shooting game animals is exempted from the requirement for preslaughter stunning. In Germany and Norway farmed fish have to be stunned prior to slaughter of killing.

In reviewing the international legislation it is helpful to examine multinational agreements on the humanitarian requirements for slaughter as this provides a quick insight into the expectations that exist in a large number of countries. The collective agreement on stunning and slaughter that has encompassed the most countries is the one from the Council of Europe. Twenty four countries had an opportunity to contribute to the Council of Europe's Code at the time it was drafted. Subsequently, the Code was used as a model during the drafting of the European Union Directive on stunning and slaughter, and that Directive has been the basis for legislation in 15 member States of the EU (Commission of the European Communities 1993). The history and content of the Council of Europe's recommendations can be summarised as follows:

On 4 July 1973 the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 709 on slaughter methods for meat animals, proposing that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of member States to conclude a European Convention on the humanisation and harmonisation of slaughter methods. Subsequent to this the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts for the Protection of Animals presented the opinion that

"animals must be stunned before being bled, so that they were completely unconscious up to the moment of death, and, if any exceptions were made to the rule, every effort must be made to spare animals any avoidable suffering." (Council of Europe 1979).

It was recognised that derogations from stunning could apply in the following cases:

- "slaughtering in accordance with religious rituals"
- "emergency slaughtering when stunning is not possible"
- "slaughtering of poultry and rabbits by authorised methods causing instantaneous death"
- "killing of animals for the purposes of health control where special reasons make this necessary"

This formed the background or starting position from which the Council of Europe's Code of Conduct was developed.

In 1991 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted the Code that was prepared by delegates from those countries (Council of Europe 1991). The recommendations in the Code included specific requirements on how animals should be stunned and killed, and some of the more general requirements were:

- "Activities which may frighten, injure or cause agitation to animals must be avoided"
- "Every effort shall be made to ensure the welfare of the animals until they are dead"
- "The guidelines in this code of conduct apply to those domestic animals commonly slaughtered in slaughterhouses, that is, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, domestic solipeds, rabbits and poultry. Other animals, even if they have been reared on farms, should not be slaughtered in slaughterhouses unless their transport, lairaging, restraint and slaughter can be carried out without causing undue distress to the animals."
- "If on arrival at the slaughterhouse an animal is found to be injured, or is in pain for any other reason, and cannot be unloaded from a vehicle without being caused pain, it must be slaughtered or killed on the vehicle without undue delay. If an animal is in pain elsewhere in the slaughterhouse it must be slaughtered or killed without delay."
- "Instruments must not be used in a manner which causes animals unnecessary pain or suffering."
- "Any stunning method shall aim at bringing the animal as quickly as possible into a state of insensibility which lasts until it is dead."
- "Stunning by the use of mechanically operated instruments or by electricity shall aim at bringing the animal instantaneously into a state of insensibility which lasts until it is dead."
- "Electrical stunning equipment shall never be used as a means of guidance, restraint or immobilisation, and shall not deliver any shock to the animal before the actual stunning or killing."

#### Conclusions

The law on stunning and slaughter is meant to reflect society's expectations on how animals can be killed for meat consumption. The law in many countries requires the humane treatment of animals prior to and during slaughter, with emphasis on inducing insensibility with a stunning procedure with a view to controlling or preventing pain in the animals. Most countries require stunning before the animals are bled or slaughtered. This requirement has been modified in the case of religious slaughter to allow for human or religious rights. In some instances the practical limitations of achieving a humane kill have been recognised (e.g. during emergency slaughter) and the requirements have been modified accordingly.

#### Pertinent Literature

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