

## Briefing – Religious Slaughter



### Requirements for humane slaughter

The basic principle of humane slaughter is that the animal should not suffer. This can be achieved in at least three ways:

- If death is instantaneous (e.g. a well-aimed bullet to the head);
- If the animal is instantaneously stunned and remains unconscious until dead (e.g. by electrical stunning or captive bolt);
- If the method of inducing unconsciousness and death is non-aversive. This may be possible using some gas mixtures (e.g. argon and/or nitrogen in the absence of oxygen).

### Legislation on stunning and slaughter in the UK

In the UK, *The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995* (as amended) (WASK) require that all animals are stunned before slaughter, using the methods of stunning prescribed by the Regulations, subject to specific exemptions. One of these exemptions refers to slaughter, without the infliction of unnecessary suffering, by the Jewish method (Shechita) for the food of Jews or by the Muslim method (Halal) for the food of Muslims.

There is no requirement under UK or EU law for the meat from animals slaughtered without stunning to be labelled as such.

### Pain caused by throat cutting without stunning

In its 2003 *Report on the Welfare of Animals at Slaughter or Killing*, the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) states:<sup>1</sup>

*“When a very large transverse incision is made across the neck a number of vital tissues are transected including: skin, muscle, trachea [wind pipe], oesophagus [gullet], carotid arteries [the major blood vessels supplying blood from the heart to the brain], jugular veins [the major blood vessels returning blood from the brain to the heart], major nerve trunks (e.g. vagus and phrenic nerves) plus numerous minor nerves. Such a drastic cut will inevitably trigger a barrage of sensory information to the brain in a sensible (conscious) animal... such a massive injury would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes.”*

The 2004 Opinion of the EU Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) states:<sup>2</sup>

*“Cuts which are used in order that rapid bleeding occurs involve substantial tissue damage in areas well-supplied with pain receptors. The rapid decrease in blood pressure which follows the blood loss is readily detected by the conscious animal and elicits fear and panic. Poor welfare also results when conscious animals inhale blood because of bleeding into the trachea.”*

Recent developments in the analysis of electrical activity in the brain allow the experience of pain to be assessed more directly than has previously been possible. Research in New Zealand shows that the slaughter of calves by neck cutting, without prior stunning, triggers specific patterns of brain electrical activity associated with pain that last until the animal loses

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<sup>1</sup> FAWC Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat Animals, June 2003 <http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/pb8347.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> AHAW (2004) Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals. [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa\\_locale-1178620753812\\_1178620775454.htm](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178620775454.htm)

consciousness.<sup>3 4</sup> This electrical activity associated with pain can be eliminated by captive-bolt stunning.<sup>5</sup>

### **Time to loss of consciousness**

The time to loss of consciousness following neck cutting varies widely between species. The AHAW Panel states:<sup>6</sup>

*“Without stunning, the time between cutting through the major blood vessels and insensibility [unconsciousness], as deduced from behavioural and brain response, is up to 20 seconds in sheep, up to 25 seconds in pigs, up to 2 minutes in cattle, up to 2½ or more minutes in poultry, and sometimes 15 minutes or more in fish”.*

Some individual animals may take longer to lose consciousness. For example, Bager *et al* (1992) found that the time to an isoelectric EEG (indicating an absence of electrical activity in the brain) in four calves following neck cutting was between 35 and 50 seconds in three of the animals but over 11 minutes in one animal.<sup>7</sup>

The time taken for animals to lose consciousness is also affected by the method of bleeding used (including the location of the cut and which major blood vessels are severed). For example, studies have found that, with some bleeding methods, the time taken may be up to almost 4 minutes in chickens<sup>8</sup> and up to 5 minutes in sheep.<sup>9</sup>

### **The basis of opposition to stunning during religious slaughter**

The Muslim method of slaughtering animals for food requires that the animals are alive and healthy at the time of slaughter. Stunning has been opposed by some Muslims because of concerns that the stun may kill the animal. The purpose of stunning is to make the animal unconscious rather than to kill it. Some methods of stunning may induce cardiac arrest at the same time as loss of consciousness (e.g. electrical stunning methods where the electrodes span the heart as well as the brain). However, head-only electrical stunning (where the electrodes span the brain only) induces unconsciousness without stopping the heart from beating so that the animal is still alive when the throat is cut.

In addition, consumption of the blood which pours forth at the time of slaughter is prohibited for Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Some Muslims have opposed stunning in the belief that it leads to a reduction in the volume of blood which drains from the body after throat-cutting. However, research carried out on the efficiency of bleed-out in sheep following slaughter shows that there is no significant

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<sup>3</sup> Mellor, D.J., Gibson, T.J. and Johnson, C.B. (2009) A re-evaluation of the need to stun calves prior to slaughter by ventral-neck incision: An introductory review. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, 57: 74-76.

<sup>4</sup> Gibson, T.J., Johnson, C.B., Murrell, J.C., Hulls, C.M., Mitchinson, S.L., Stafford, K.L., Johnstone, A.C. and Mellor, D.J. (2009) Electroencephalographic responses of halothane-anaesthetised calves to slaughter by ventral-neck incision without prior stunning. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, 57: 77-83.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson, T.J., Johnson, C.B., Murrell, J.C., Mitchinson, S.L., Stafford, K.L. and Mellor, D.J. (2009) Amelioration of electroencephalographic responses to slaughter by non-penetrative captive-bolt stunning after ventral-neck incision in halothane-anaesthetised calves. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, 57: 96-101.

<sup>6</sup> AHAW (2004) Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals. [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa\\_locale-1178620753812\\_1178620775454.htm](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178620775454.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Bager, F., Braggins, T.J., Devine, C.E., Graafhuis, A.E., Mellor, D.J., Tavener, A. and Upsdell, M.P. (1992) Onset of insensibility at slaughter in calves: effects of electroplectic seizure and exsanguination on spontaneous electrocortical activity and indices of cerebral metabolism. *Research in Veterinary Science*, 52: 162-173.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory, N.G. and Wotton, S.B. (1986) Effect of slaughter on the spontaneous and evoked activity of the brain. *British Poultry Science*, 27: 195-205.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory, N.G. and Wotton, S.B. (1984) Sheep slaughtering procedures II. Time to loss of brain responsiveness after exsanguination or cardiac arrest. *British Veterinary Journal*, 140: 354-360.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'ân 6:145

difference in the rate of blood loss when the throat is cut with or without stunning.<sup>11</sup> Similar research with cattle confirms that there is no difference between stunned and non-stunned animals in terms of the total volume of blood loss, the blood loss as a percentage of the weight of the animal, nor the percentage of the estimated total blood volume that drains from the carcass.<sup>12</sup>

The Jewish method of slaughtering animals for food requires that the animals are healthy at the time of slaughter and that they must not have suffered any physical injury. For this reason, pre-slaughter stunning methods that are judged to cause physical injuries prior to cutting the throat have been considered unacceptable.

However, electrical stunning does not injure the animal. If the throat is not cut following an electrical stun applied to the head, the animal will recover completely from the stun. In addition, Compassion in World Farming believes that stunning should be viewed as part of the slaughter process, rather than something which happens before slaughter. From this perspective, animals are not injured before slaughter but during slaughter (and by definition all animals receive an injury during slaughter, whether or not they are stunned).

### **Acceptance of stunning by certain religious authorities**

In his 1989 book, *Animals in Islam*, Al-Hafiz Masri, the first Sunni Imam of the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking, states:<sup>13</sup>

*“... there should remain no doubt in anybody’s mind that the modern apparatus and techniques of slaughter, including stunners, cause no impediment to the normal flow of blood which is the most important hygienic requirement of the Islamic laws of slaughter... At the same time they do mitigate the pain and grief of the animal. In the spirit of the Islamic teachings, the use of such aids and techniques is not merely a matter of choice and preference; it is for Muslims a moral imperative and religious obligation. Refusal to use them and not to spare the animal avoidable pain is, without doubt, a SIN OF OMISSION.”*

The Joint Committee of the League of the Muslim World and the World Health Organization met at the Institute of Veterinary Medicine in West Berlin in 1986 to witness two stunning demonstrations on sheep. The Joint Committee observed that, after being stunned, both animals made “a full recovery” and added that “this demonstrated the reversible nature of electrical stunning”. The Joint Committee went on to state that “extensive experience in Western countries and in New Zealand has shown that electrical stunning applied to the head only does not cause death and is reversible. The animal so stunned will make a complete recovery if it is not slaughtered”. The Joint Committee concluded that animals being slaughtered to provide meat that is acceptable for Muslims to eat can be electrically stunned provided that the stun does not cause death.<sup>14</sup>

Electrical stunning is also accepted by the Halal Food Authority in the UK<sup>15</sup> and by the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization’s (SASO) *Animal Slaughtering Requirements According to Islamic Law*. The Arab Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) *Standard for Islamic Halal Slaughter Regulations for Meat and Poultry* permits head-only electrical stunning of mammals, provided it

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<sup>11</sup> FAWC Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat Animals, June 2003 <http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/pb8347.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Anil, M.H., Yeslidere, T., Aksu, H., Matur, E., McKinstry, J.L., Weaver, H.R., Erdogan, O., Hughes, S. and Mason, C. (2006) Comparison of halal slaughter with captive bolt stunning and neck cutting in cattle: Exsanguination and quality parameters. *Animal Welfare*, 15: 325-330.

<sup>13</sup> Masri, B. A. Al-Hafiz (1989) *Animals in Islam*. Athene Trust.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.ciwf.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/a/animal\\_welfare\\_problems\\_in\\_uk\\_slaughterhouses\\_2001.pdf](http://www.ciwf.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/a/animal_welfare_problems_in_uk_slaughterhouses_2001.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/pressrelaese\\_faqs.pdf](http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/pressrelaese_faqs.pdf)

does not kill the animal.<sup>16</sup> This standard is enforced by Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Certain Muslim authorities have maintained an objection to electrical stunning of poultry due to concerns that a number of birds may die as a result of the stun before being bled. However, two scholars from the Jeddah-based International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) recently conducted an investigation of poultry slaughter in Turkey and concluded that the birds did not die from the stun. They removed some of the stunned birds from the slaughter line and found that they recovered consciousness within three minutes. If this finding is accepted by the Council of Ulema at the IIFA, it will pave the way for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to set a Halal food standard for the slaughter of poultry to be followed by Muslims throughout the world.<sup>17</sup>

In an interview for Time Magazine in 2003, Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok, a professor of Judaism at the University of Wales, argued that Shechita was the most humane form of slaughter when it developed over a millennium ago, but that it is no longer in keeping with high ethical principles and compassion for animals is the overriding principle that should guide contemporary Jews.<sup>18</sup>

### **Stunning of animals during religious slaughter in the UK**

Data on the use of stunning for religious slaughter in UK slaughterhouses are not currently collected. However studies suggest that a substantial proportion of animals (including poultry) slaughtered for Halal meat in the UK are now stunned. However, all poultry and the majority of mammals slaughtered for Kosher meat are not stunned and those that are only receive the stun after the throat has been cut.

### **Stunning of animals during religious slaughter in other countries**

A number of countries, including Sweden, Norway and New Zealand, have prohibited religious slaughter in the sense that they require all animals to be stunned before throat cutting even if the animals are being slaughtered for the food of Muslims or Jews.

New Zealand is a large exporter of Halal-slaughtered sheep meat and a significant exporter of Halal-slaughtered beef. All of these exports are derived from animals who have been stunned before slaughter and this is accepted by the importing countries.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Slaughter without pre-stunning inflicts unnecessary pain and distress on animals and Compassion in World Farming believes that it should not be permitted. Whilst we respect the right to religious freedom, we do not believe this should extend to practices that inflict suffering on animals.

This view is supported by the recommendations of leading scientific bodies. The UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) states:<sup>19</sup>

*“Council considers that slaughter without pre-stunning is unacceptable and that the Government should repeal the current exemption.”*

The EU Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) similarly concludes:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.thepoultrysite.com/articles/186/gcc-standard-for-islamic-halal-slaughter-regulations-for-meat-and-poultry-2004>

<sup>17</sup> <http://arabnews.com/saudiArabia/article88534.ece>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901030623-458740,00.html>

<sup>19</sup> FAWC (2003) Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat Animals. <http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/pb8347.pdf>

*“Due to the serious animal welfare concerns associated with slaughter without stunning, pre-cut stunning should always be performed.”*

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is also strongly opposed to slaughter without pre-stunning:<sup>21</sup>

*“FVE is of the opinion that the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances”.*

Compassion in World Farming is concerned that the exemption from the legal requirement to pre-stun may be being abused, potentially leading to more animals being slaughtered without pre-stunning than are required by religious communities. The exemption was never intended to permit meat from animals who have not been stunned to be used for consumption by the general population. Caterers (including hospitals, schools, restaurants and venues for sporting and other events) who serve meat from animals who have not been stunned to customers, students or patients who are not Muslims or Jews are arguably implicated in the unlawful slaughter without stunning of animals who are not destined for the food of Muslims or Jews. This is unacceptable not only from an animal welfare point of view but also because consumers have no way of knowing whether the meat they consume has come from an animal who has been slaughtered without pre-stunning.

Until the current exemption permitting slaughter without pre-stunning is repealed, Compassion in World Farming believes the law should require that all animals who are not pre-stunned must at least receive an immediate post-cut stun and that all meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning must be clearly labelled as such. The European Parliament voted in June 2010 to require compulsory labelling for all meat from animals killed without stunning. In order to become law, this would require approval by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

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<sup>20</sup> AHAW (2004) Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals.

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<sup>21</sup> FVE (2002) Slaughter of Animals without Prior Stunning. FVE Position Paper 02/104. Federation of Veterinarians of Europe.