

Reports and Comments

Proposal for a Council Regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing

The EU Commission has recently issued a proposal for a Council Regulation to replace Council Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. It is the Commission's view that by changing from a Directive to a Regulation the legal requirements will be applied in full and simultaneously across the EU, and will avoid delays and lack of uniformity that can arise from the need for a Directive to be enforced through national legislation. The Commission proposes that the new Regulation will apply from 1 January 2011.

The Regulation will apply to the killing of all farmed vertebrate animals with the exception of reptiles and amphibians. Fish are also excluded from the detailed requirements on the basis that research on the stunning of fish is far less advanced than for other farmed species. Therefore, at the present time, only the key principle that animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations shall apply to fish. However, it is proposed that separate standards should be established for the protection of fish at killing at a later date.

The proposed Regulation expands on the requirements of the Directive. It will require all personnel involved in the handling, restraining, stunning, shackling/hoisting and bleeding of live animals to hold a certificate of competence issued by the national competent authority, or an organisation designated by the competent authority, following completion of an approved training course and the passing of a final examination. The certificates of competence will be issued for a period not exceeding five years. However, Member States will be able to recognise other qualifications as certificates of competence, provided they have been issued under conditions equivalent to those specified in the Regulation. Member States will have to recognise certificates of competence issued in another Member State. There is a 'grandfather' provision which, until the end of 2014, will permit Member States to issue certificates of competence without an examination to individuals demonstrating relevant, uninterrupted professional experience of at least ten years.

The Regulation will also require the operator of a slaughterhouse to appoint an animal welfare officer (AWO) who would have the authority to require employees to take all necessary actions to comply with the requirements of the Regulation. AWOs will be required to hold a certificate of competence covering all the slaughterhouse operations for which they are responsible. However, very small slaughterhouses (those slaughtering less than 1,000 livestock units of mammals or 150,000 units of poultry per year) are excluded from the requirement to appoint an AWO.

Member States will be required to establish a national reference centre which will provide technical assistance on animal welfare at killing. The centre will be responsible for providing scientific assessments for new stunning methods/

equipment and newly built slaughterhouses, disseminate codes of good practice and accredit organisations delivering training and certificates of competence on animal welfare. The Regulation contains an Annex detailing requirements for the construction, layout and equipment of slaughterhouses. However, until the end of 2018 these requirements will only apply to new slaughterhouses, or to any new construction, equipment or changes to the layout occurring subsequent to the Regulation coming into force.

Member States will be required to ensure that animal welfare is considered at all stages of the process when animals are killed for disease control purposes. They will have to draw up an action plan to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Regulation before any animals are killed. They will also be required to submit within one year, a report to the Commission detailing the results of any culling programme.

The Regulation contains other new requirements aimed at improving animal welfare at killing, including the severing of both carotid arteries, the use of constant-current equipment for electrical stunning, minimum currents for head-only electrical stunning and restrictions on the use of non-penetrating captive-bolt stunners. However, for economic reasons, the Commission has decided not to require either the phasing out of the use of carbon dioxide for killing pigs and poultry, or the phasing out of waterbath stunners for poultry.

Proposal for a Council Regulation on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing 2008. 553/3, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels. Available for download at <http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/slaughter/>

AC Hughes

HSA

Scottish Centre for Animal Welfare Sciences workshop on animal athletes: welfare of animals in sport (racehorses and greyhounds)

More than 90 people attended a Scottish Centre for Animal Welfare Sciences (SCAWS) workshop, held on 24th September 2008 at the Moredun Research Institute in Edinburgh, UK.

It was chaired by Sir Colin Spedding and sponsored by Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, British Equine Veterinary Association Trust, Dogs Trust, Fort Dodge, International Society Applied Ethology, Edinburgh Centre for Rural Research and British Society for Animal Science.

The programme was directed at welfare 'Concerns' and 'Solutions' and they are reported here.

Of general concern was the quality and enforcement of regulations to ensure the physical and mental well-being of racing animals, throughout their lives. It was also a concern that emotion and intuition are sometimes accepted as the only evidence in welfare disputes when scientific evidence and experienced judgement are available.