

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1118](#)

Main Petitioner: Josey Rowan

Subject: calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to bring forward legislation to ban the killing of animals through methods such as the shechita and the dhabihah, and require the stunning of all animals before slaughter.

Background

Shechita is the religious slaughter of mammals and birds according to Jewish dietary laws to produce meat that is kosher. It is carried out by drawing a very sharp knife across the animal's throat and allowing the blood to drain out. Stunning the animal before slaughter is forbidden.

Dhabihah is the religious slaughter of all animals (excluding fish and sea life) under Islamic law to produce meat that is halal. The method involves a swift, deep incision with a sharp knife on the neck, cutting the jugular veins and carotid arteries of both sides but leaving the spinal cord intact. As with shechita the objective is to drain the body of the animal's blood.

The law on religious slaughter in Scotland

The EU adopted detailed welfare at slaughter rules in 1993 in Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. The EU law is implemented in Great Britain by the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995, as amended, (WASK regulations).

The WASK regulations require animals to be stunned before being slaughtered. Pre-stunning is either carried out using a captive bolt, an electrical shock, or by gassing, depending on the size and species of the animal.

An exception to the requirement for animals to be pre-stunned exists to allow religious slaughter in accordance with the requirements of Judaism and Islam. An amendment made to the WASK regulations in February 1999 means that in Great Britain religious slaughter can only be carried out in a licensed slaughterhouse. Religious slaughter is not permitted in any other place, even for personal consumption.

A person carrying out religious slaughter must be a licensed slaughterman under the regulations. A person carrying out slaughter by the Jewish method must also be licensed by the Chief Rabbi (in England and Wales by the Rabbinical Commission).

The regulations establish specific requirements for the restraining and handling of animals, to ensure the knife used is sharp and undamaged, the

method of slaughter (the severance, by rapid, uninterrupted movements of a knife, of both its carotid arteries and both its jugular veins). The regulations also set a time period before which an animal can be moved (20 seconds for a sheep or goat and 30 seconds for cattle). There are also specific provisions for slaughtering poultry by a religious method. It is an offence to slaughter animals in a way which contravenes the regulations. Enforcement of the WASK regulations at licensed slaughterhouses is the responsibility of Official Veterinary Surgeons employed by the Meat Hygiene Service.

There is currently no slaughter without pre-stunning carried out at any slaughterhouse in Scotland. All kosher meat is therefore imported. Some muslims will accept meat as being halal if the animal is pre-stunned, as long as the stunning does not kill the animal, so that it is still alive when its throat is cut. If the slaughterman believes the pre-stunning has killed the animal, then the meat will not be considered as halal. Other muslims do not consider meat which has been pre-stunned to be halal.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government's position is that it has no intention of changing the law to make the killing of animals without pre-stunning illegal as long as it is carried out in accordance with the existing regulations. The following Parliamentary Question considered the pre-stunning of sheep:

S3W-8024 - Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab) (Date Lodged 19 December 2007): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers it acceptable for Scottish sheep to be exported for slaughter without pre-stunning.

Answered by Richard Lochhead (14 January 2008): Although the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning does not take place in Scotland, it would be perfectly legal for this method to be used in Scottish slaughterhouses. The slaughter of sheep without pre-stunning for religious reasons is legal throughout the EU and to ban the export of sheep would contravene free trade rules and would be illegal under EU law.

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