Key facts...

- Consumers have a right to know where their meat comes from, how it was reared, and how it was killed at the time of slaughter.
- Around 40 million cattle, sheep, pigs and calves and around 900 million poultry are killed each year in the UK.
- It is estimated that 3% of cattle, 10% of sheep and goats and 4% of poultry that are slaughtered in Britain are not pre-stunned, with one estimate showing 114 million animals are killed annually in the UK using the Halal method and a further 2.1 million under Shechita.
- The value of the Halal market is estimated to be between £1-2 billion and could represent 25% of the UK meat market.
- Scientific research indicates that the slaughter of an animal without pre-stunning can cause unnecessary suffering.
- The RSPCA believes that all animals should be effectively stunned before they are slaughtered.
- Whilst the RSPCA believes that religious beliefs should be respected we continue to press for changes to legislation that would improve the welfare of all animals being slaughtered and ask both Muslim and Jewish communities to review their slaughter methods.
- Whilst slaughter without pre-stunning remains permissible under the law, mandatory labelling should be introduced so that all meat from animals that have not been stunned is labelled.

Context

Around 40 million cattle, sheep, pigs and calves and around 900 million poultry are killed each year in the UK. It is estimated that 3% of cattle, 10% of sheep and goats and 4% of poultry that are slaughtered in Britain are not pre-stunned with one estimate showing 114 million animals are killed annually in the UK using the halal method and a further 2.1 million under Shechita. The value of the halal market is estimated to be between £1 and £2 billion and could represent 25% of the UK meat market.

In April 2014 the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and RSPCA launched an e-petition on the issue of non-stun slaughter calling for an end to it. It currently has 115,225 signatures indicating strong feeling on this matter and there is due to be a debate on this on 23rd February 2015.

Welfare concerns

Scientific research indicates that the slaughter of an animal without pre-stunning can cause unnecessary suffering. Whilst the RSPCA believes that religious beliefs should be respected we continue to press for changes to legislation that would improve the welfare of all animals being slaughtered and ask both Muslim and Jewish communities to review their slaughter methods. Whilst slaughter without

---

1 FSA 2012 Results of 2011 animal welfare survey in GB. FSA. Figures extrapolated from data collected at GB abattoirs during one week in September.
2 www.dialrel.eu/publications the development of halal and kosher meat markets in the UK
3 http://petitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/64331 (accessed 29.10.14)
4 as of 20.02.15
5 FAWC 2003. Welfare of farmed animals at slaughter and killing – part 1 red meat animals.
pre-stunning remains permissible under the law, mandatory labelling should be introduced so that all meat from animals that have not been stunned is labelled.

The 2003, Farm Animal Welfare Council Report on animal welfare at slaughter\(^6\), included a review of slaughter without pre-stunning. After reviewing available evidence and information, it concluded the following:

- on handling before slaughter, the level of restraint needed to expose the throat and perform an effective cut was far greater than that needed for conventional slaughter,
- if a neck cut is performed, it would trigger a barrage of sensory information to the brain in a conscious animal. FAWC concluded: “We are persuaded that such a massive injury would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes”
- the time taken to lose brain responsiveness after the cut varied according to the species but in sheep it was 5-7 seconds after the cut, in adult cattle 22-40 seconds and in calves 10-120 seconds. Overall, FAWC considered that: “slaughter without pre-stunning is unacceptable and that the Government should repeal the current exemption”.

FAWC recommended that until the Government repeal the current exemption, any animal that is not stunned before slaughter should receive an immediate post cut stun. Recent research shows that calves do appear to feel pain when they are slaughtered without pre stunning. Pain signals lasting up to two minutes were detected after cutting the neck\(^7\) but using a non penetrative captive bolt within five seconds after the cut would render these animals insensible to the pain\(^8\).

The European Commission’s contracted study into the issue in 2009 concluded that there was a high risk of pain and suffering for animals that had not been stunned in both the cut and post-cut period compared to a low risk in both periods when animals were pre stunned; for animals that were stunned post-cut there was concluded to be a high risk during the cut period and an intermediate risk during post-cut\(^9\).

### Legal situation

Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 updates the European rules on welfare at slaughter. Implementation rules of this Regulation for England (the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) (WATOK)) are currently being drafted and are now expected to be agreed at the end of this year. Until then the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) (WASK) Regulations 1995 will remain in force in England alongside Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009.

Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, like its predecessor, balances the questions of animal welfare and the protection of the human right to religious freedom by giving an exemption to the rules which mandate stunning before slaughter, provided that slaughter happens in an abattoir and the resulting meat is destined for consumption by the respective religious communities only. The size of these specific markets should determine the amount of non-stunned meat that is produced. Slaughterhouse operators must be able to demonstrate that the conditions for exemption from stunning are met.

The application of this derogation is left to the Member State. Latvia, Sweden and Åland (a province of Finland) do not allow religious slaughter without pre-stunning whilst Austria, Estonia and Slovakia allow slaughter without pre-stunning provided it is followed by a post-cut stun. Denmark allows this for cattle

\(^6\) ibid

For further information: [politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk) [www.politicalanimal.org.uk](http://www.politicalanimal.org.uk)
only and allows slaughter without pre-stunning for other species.

**Labelling**

A Commission funded study into the effectiveness and applicability of labelling meat products based on method of slaughter is due to report at the end of 2014. The RSPCA awaits to see what is said on the subject.

In September 2013, Eblex, the British trade body for the beef and sheep industry, launched a consultation on introducing a halal assured quality label for their producers which would provide information as to whether the meat had come from an animal that had been stunned or not stunned.

The British Veterinary Association (BVA), RSPCA and Humane Slaughter Association statement on ‘Welfare at Slaughter’ states that the principle is that all animals should be effectively stunned before they are slaughtered and consumers should be educated through a simple ‘logo’ to indicate meat obtained from non-stunned animals. The RSPCA believes that consumers have a right to know where their meat comes from, how it was reared, and how it was killed at the time of slaughter.

**Conclusion**

The RSPCA, along with the BVA and Humane Slaughter Association believe that if the Westminster Government does not wish to create a legal requirement for all animals to be stunned before slaughter, and instead intends to continue to allow an exemption for non-stun slaughter, then we would encourage it to explore a range of alternative options and actions to improve animal welfare and consumer awareness. These are not in order of priority and include:

- working with Government agencies, the appropriate authorities and stakeholders, to enhance enforcement of existing welfare at slaughter legislation where non-stun slaughter takes place
- immediate post-cut stunning
- ensuring sufficient time and facilities for the Official Veterinarian to be able to adequately monitor welfare when non-stun slaughter is taking place
- educating consumers about animal welfare at slaughter and giving them confidence when buying meat or meat products by:
  - providing them with reliable explanatory information about food labels or logos of assurance schemes that require stunning before slaughter, so they can make informed choices
  - introducing a simple logo for packaging to indicate meat obtained from non-stunned animals, or considering promoting labelling of existing farm assurance schemes which require stunning before slaughter
- meeting and working with representatives of the relevant religious communities

For further information: [politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk)  [www.politicalanimal.org.uk](http://www.politicalanimal.org.uk)