

NSS calls on Government to end religious exemption from animal welfare laws

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The National Secular Society has called on the Government to end the religious exemption to animal welfare legislation that permits animals to be slaughtered without stunning.

Non-stun slaughter is permitted in the UK despite a recommendation by the Government's own advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), that the practice should be banned.

The scientific consensus is clear that it is more humane to stun an animal prior to slaughter than not to do so. An end to the exemption that permits non-stun slaughter is supported by the EU's Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW), The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe, The British Veterinary Association, The RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming, amongst others.

In its response to a DEFRA consultation on Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing, the NSS has urged the Government to adopt new stricter national rules to prohibit non-stun slaughter. Until such time as the exemption is removed, the NSS has called for the mandatory labelling of meat and meat products derived from animals killed by non-stun slaughter methods.

The exemption for religious slaughter restricts meat slaughtered by the Shechita method to Jews and by some Halal methods to Muslims. However, the Scottish Government has recently admitted that this targeting of supply has not been enforced. As a result, meat from non-stun slaughter routinely enters the general food chain.

Stephen Evans, Campaigns Manager at the National Secular Society said: "Permitting meat from non-stun religious slaughter methods to enter the general food chain is not only ethically unacceptable, it is also unlawful.

"As long as the Government insists on granting privilege to religious groups, permitting slaughter methods that cause unnecessary pain, suffering and distress, it has a duty to ensure that no more animals are slaughtered under the exemption than is absolutely necessary to meet religious demand. Labelling would at least ensure people who wish to avoid meat from religious slaughter are able to do so. At present, unwitting consumers are subsidising the religious slaughter industry and that is simply unacceptable."

New domestic regulations will come before Parliament at the end of 2012 to implement and enforce European Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing. While this regulation allows religious slaughter to continue, individual member states can impose stricter rules in relation to religious slaughter and can refuse to exempt religious slaughter from pre-stunning regulations.

If you support new stricter national rules to end the exemption in relation to religious slaughter and wish to ensure all animals are stunned prior to slaughter [please take part in the consultation](#).

The English consultation closes on 24 October. The Scottish consultation ends on 26 October and the Welsh consultation Closes 5 November 2012.

Our response to the Defra consultation can be read [here](#). To find out more read the NSS [campaign briefing](#) on this issue.

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