

NSS backs call for religious slaughter ban ahead of House of Lords debate

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The National Secular Society has backed renewed calls from the RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations for an end to the religious exemption that allows farm animals to be slaughtered without prior stunning.

The call comes ahead of a House of Lords debate on the ethical, legal and religious factors that influence the way in which some animals are slaughtered in the UK.

Animal welfare legislation requires all animals to be stunned before slaughter in order to minimise suffering. The only exemption is for religious communities to meet Jewish and Muslim religious requirements.

A [joint statement](#) issued by the RSPCA, British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) ahead of today's debate has called for all animals to be effectively stunned before they are slaughtered.

Animal welfare organisations are also calling for food derived from animals slaughtered under the legal exemption to be restricted to the specific religious communities according to whose beliefs the animals have been slaughtered.

The RSPCA said that while it recognises that religious beliefs and practices should be respected, it also believes that animals should only be slaughtered under the most humane conditions.

The call echoes the position of the National Secular Society, which has long campaigned for an end to the exemption that allows religious groups to slaughter animals without pre-stunning.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "While we support the right to freedom of religious and other belief, the right to manifest belief is not absolute, and we strongly oppose religious exemptions to animal welfare regulations which apply for good reason and without exception to everyone else.

"It is well known that meat from religious slaughter is routinely entering the general food chain. This means that unwitting members of the public are unknowingly subsidising the religious slaughter industry. If the Government wishes to retain religious exemptions, it should at least support mandatory method of slaughter labelling to ensure that consumers can make an informed choice about the food they purchase."

In October 2012 the NSS called on the Government to ensure that all animals are stunned prior to slaughter in its [response to a DEFRA consultation](#) on the welfare of animals at the time of killing.

Method of slaughter labelling is currently being considered by the EU Commission and the NSS will be calling for new European rules on this in 2014.

[Read the RSPCA press release](#)

[Read the NSS briefing on religious slaughter](#)

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