

Denmark bans religious slaughter

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Denmark's Agriculture and Food Minister Dan Jørgensen has signed into law a regulation that bans religious slaughter of animals.

European Union [regulations](#) require stunning before slaughter, but permit member states to allow exemptions for religious slaughter. Under the new law, Danish slaughterhouses will no longer be able to apply for an exemption to pre-stunning.

The move has been opposed by Jewish and Muslim religious leaders in Denmark, who have argued that the ban constitutes an infringement of religious freedom.

However, defending the government's decision, Mr Jørgensen told Denmark's TV2 television that "animal rights come before religion".

Denmark is a major exporter of Halal meat to the Arab world and Halal food is widely available throughout the country. Revelations last year that Danes were being served unlabelled meat from Islamic slaughter at public institutions triggered a nationwide debate on the practice of religious slaughter – and how far Denmark should go to accommodate the estimated 250,000 Muslims living in the country.

According to the World Jewish Congress, the ban will have little practical consequences for Jewish life in Denmark since for the past ten years all kosher meat sold in Denmark has been imported from abroad.

Denmark joins a growing list of countries, including Norway, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland, where religious slaughter is prohibited.

Earlier this year the National Secular Society [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.

In 2013, the coalition government said it [would not remove the exemption](#) despite "strong pressure" from welfare groups, veterinary interests and the public for a prohibition on all slaughter without stunning.

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