

Non-stun slaughter ban comes into effect in northern Belgium

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The slaughter of animals without pre-stunning is set to be significantly reduced in Belgium after a ban came into effect in the north of the country.

A measure outlawing the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning took effect in the Flanders region on New Year's Day.

The region's parliament unanimously [passed](#) a resolution outlawing ritual slaughter without stunning in 2017. Flanders roughly covers the northern half of Belgium, also known as the Flemish region.

A similar measure is set to take effect in the Walloon region, which roughly covers the southern half of Belgium, in September. A committee of the Walloon parliament [voted](#) unanimously to end non-stun slaughter in 2017.

Slaughter of cows and calves will be exempt from the Walloon measure until a better stunning technique is developed for them.

The legislation in Flanders does not prevent non-stunned meat from being imported.

National Secular Society spokesperson Chris Sloggett said the legislation was "largely welcome" and should prompt similar action in the UK.

"Government policies on the treatment of animals should be led by the scientific evidence, which makes clear that non-stunned slaughter is inhumane. Religion should not be a get-out clause from reasonable protections on animal rights.

"The UK government should reflect on this legislation in Belgium and take similar steps to protect animal welfare and the principle of one law for all."

The NSS campaigns to [repeal](#) the religious exemption to animal welfare legislation. The exemption means animals may be slaughtered without pre-stunning for religious reasons.

In October the NSS [revealed](#) that at least 17 councils were providing non-stun halal meat to dozens of schools.

The RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming and the British Veterinary Association have all criticised non-stun slaughter, along with many animal welfare experts.

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) – a UK government body – has said animals slaughtered without stunning are likely to experience "very significant pain and distress" before they become unconscious. FAWC has recommended outlawing non-stun slaughter.

The EU's scientific panel on animal health and welfare has said "pre-cut stunning should always be performed".

Ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning is [outlawed](#) in European countries including [Denmark](#), Norway and Sweden. The practice is partially outlawed in Switzerland.

In May two senior EU politicians said they would oppose restrictions on rituals such as genital cutting and religious animal slaughter, prompting NSS [criticism](#).

Several religious leaders have criticised the Belgian measures [including](#) Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, and Menachem Margolin, who chairs the Europe Jewish Association.

Legal challenges have been launched against the legislation. One has been instigated by US-based think tank the Lawfare Project, which claims to campaign in favour of civil and human rights for Jews.

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