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Response to Lancashire County Council's halal meat consultation 2018

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About the National Secular Society

The National Secular Society is a party-politically neutral organisation that works for the separation of religion and state, and for equal respect for everyone's human rights so that no one is either advantaged or disadvantaged on account of their beliefs. We regard secularism and freedom of expression as essential features of a fair and open society.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to provide only stunned halal meat to schools?

Strongly agree

Why do you say this?

Stunned halal meat is the only ethical option and it is accepted by the majority of Muslims.

The scientific consensus is clear that it is more humane to stun an animal prior to slaughter than not doing so. That is why animal welfare legislation requires all animals to be stunned before slaughter in order to minimise suffering, with exemptions given only to animals slaughtered by halal or kosher methods.

The government's own advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), has recommended that the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning should be banned, with no exemptions. The FAWC have concluded that animals slaughtered without pre-stunning are likely to experience "very significant pain and distress" before they become unconscious.

Likewise, the EU's Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) have stated that: "Due to the serious animal welfare concerns associated with slaughter without stunning, pre-cut stunning should always be performed."

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) have stated: "FVE is of the opinion that the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstances".

RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming and the British Veterinary Association all support an end to non-stun slaughter to improve animal welfare at the time of death.

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have all banned non-stun slaughter.

It is clear that the majority of Muslims in the UK accept pre-stunning prior to slaughter. Figures from the Food Standards Agency say that in 2012 of those animals slaughtered in the UK according to halal rules, 84% of cattle or calves, 81% of sheep and goats, and 88% of poultry were stunned before slaughter.

It is not true that all Muslims agree that unstunned meat is more “authentically” halal than stunned meat, or that unstunned meat is more widely accepted. Some halal suppliers consider stunned meat to be more in-line with Islamic values than unstunned meat because it causes less suffering. For example, halal supplier Najma [states on its website](#): “We follow the Islamic values of treating all animals with kindness and compassion. To ensure the welfare of the animals, we do use recoverable stunning prior to slaughter. This is in accordance to the specific rules set out by the Islamic faith and under supervision of our European Halal certifying bodies.”

It should also be noted that the non-stunned halal sector is harming retailers of stunned halal. The Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) is putting halal suppliers under pressure by pushing the message that only non-stunned meat is “genuinely Halal”, implying that suppliers who sell stunned meat or do not bear the HMC logo are contravening Islamic law. Because halal suppliers fear losing the trust of their customers, they may feel forced to switch to unstunned halal meat and pay thousands of pounds for HMC certification.

A BBC News Look North segment reported on the issue of unstunned halal in Halifax in 2011. One halal trader interviewed, Ahmed Pervaz of Medina Poultry who has 20 years’ experience in the industry, stated that HMC are “really hammering the halal industry” and that “they’re nothing but a scam.” He said that “people believe them because they appear to be Islamically dressed, Islamically knowledgeable, but when it comes to halal, they have no authority.”

Councils have a duty to provide healthy and nutritious schools meals. They also have a duty to ensure the food they provide is sourced ethically in a manner that does not harm people, animals or the environment. They do not have a duty to cater for every religious dietary preference of every pupil’s family, and especially if those preferences mean contravening the advice of veterinary and farming associations, and causing harm to local businesses.

What impact would this proposal have on you?

This proposal has nation-wide implications. If the council reverses its decision to stop supplying unstunned meat in schools, it will give greater power to religious interest groups to assert their agenda on councils in other areas. It will also set a direction of travel for society as a whole with regards to animal welfare policy.

If LCC decide to supply unstunned meat to schools, it will amount to state support for slaughter methods that are regarded worldwide as unnecessarily cruel. It will send the message that the UK prioritises the demands of orthodox religious minorities over the basic welfare needs of animals. While increasing numbers of countries are deciding to ban non-stun slaughter, the UK will be moving in the opposite direction to the current trend in developed economies.

What, if anything, do you think could be done differently in providing halal meat to schools?

While it is important for councils to consider dietary requirements of school children, no council should be pressured into supplying meat slaughtered in a method that contravenes animal welfare out of religious concerns.

The National Secular Society has been researching the provision of halal meat to schools by UK councils. The majority of councils that the NSS has surveyed do not supply unstunned halal meat to schools. Several specifically state that they will not supply unstunned halal on animal welfare grounds; a few examples are given below:

“ACC sources its meat products via nationally procured frameworks. Our suppliers take animal welfare very seriously. All farmed animals which are slaughtered for their products are done so humanely, in accordance with EU and UK law. This includes provision to ensure that animals are rendered insensible to pain, distress or suffering, prior to killing and includes the stunning of animals prior to slaughter. Traditional Halal slaughter, which forbids the stunning of animals, is a practice which is not accepted by our suppliers on animal welfare grounds.” (Aberdeen County Council)

“All animal product is stunned before slaughter in line with our food life and better animal welfare accreditations.” (Greenwich Borough Council)

“The current providers providing school meals within the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham central contract supply Halal meat which meets the HFA standards and is pre stunned. As a local authority, we have specified that the halal meat provision is to meet the HFA standards and all British animal welfare standards.” (Hammersmith & Fulham Council)

“The current providers providing school meals within the RBKC central contract supply Halal meat which meets the HFA standards and is pre stunned. As a local Authority we have specified that the halal meat provision is to meet the HFA standards and all British animal welfare standards.” (Kensington & Chelsea Borough Council)

“Schools that work in partnership with Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS) Catering are provided with halal products that have been stunned before slaughter.” (Leicestershire County Council)

“The Nottinghamshire County Council School Meals service does not include halal/kosher meat in its meals - pupils opt to have a vegetarian option” (Nottinghamshire County Council)

A vegetarian option should always be available in school meals. This would be acceptable to those Muslims who refuse to eat stunned meat.

It should also be stressed to families that those who wish their child to eat unstunned meat would still be permitted to provide the meat in a packed lunch.