

Protection of animals at the time of killing

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the report drawn up by Janusz WOJCIECHOWSKI (UEN, PL) amending, under the consultation procedure, the proposal for a Council regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing.

The main amendments are as follows:

Scope: the Regulation will not apply in the context of the activities regulated by Council Directive 86/609 /EEC on the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes. Nor will it apply to recreational fishing or in the following cases:

- for major religious festivities involving traditional sacrifices for direct consumption, for example at Easter or Christmas and only for a period of ten days preceding the relevant dates;
- semi-domesticated deer, shot in the field and processed through a game farm facility.

Definitions: the committee inserted definitions for “competent authority” and “unconsciousness” and amended the definition for “stunning” deleting the words “without pain” in the latter. Raccoon dogs and rabbits are added to the definition of fur animal.

Stunning: the report states that bleeding shall start as soon as possible after stunning.

Standard operating procedures: in the interests of simpler administration, the procedures laid down in this Regulation need to be combined with other, similar, procedures in the Hygiene Package.

The report also specifies that the official veterinarian shall be notified in writing whenever standard operating procedures have changed. The competent authority may amend standard operating procedures when they are clearly not in line with the general, rules and requirements laid down in the regulation.

Use of restraining and stunning equipment: Members add that no animal shall be restrained if the slaughterer responsible for stunning or slaughtering that animal is not ready to do so.

Imports from third countries: the committee adds that, in the course of an inspection of slaughterhouses or establishments which have been, or are to be, approved in third countries for the purpose of being able to export to the EU in accordance with EU legislation, the Commission experts shall ensure that the live animals have been slaughtered under conditions which, as far as animal welfare is concerned, are at least equivalent to those provided for in the Regulation. The health certificate accompanying meat imported from a third country shall be supplemented by an attestation certifying that the above requirement has been met.

Arrangements for imports from third countries: a new clause states that the Commission shall ensure that meat and meat products from third countries that are intended for consumption in the internal market comply with the provisions of the Regulation.

Layout of slaughterhouses: members deleted the requirement that the competent authority must approve the maximum throughput for each slaughter line. They state that this entails taking into account not only animal welfare, but also other aspects such as the post mortem inspection.

Restraining operations before slaughter: Members deleted the prohibition of the use of electric currents that do not stun or kill the animals under controlled circumstances. They note that low-voltage electro-immobilisation after stunning and before bleeding-out can prevent dangerous muscular reflex movements by animals, which cause a large number of accidents at the workplace among slaughter men.

Monitoring at slaughter: animals must be dead before any other potentially painful carcass-dressing procedure is performed or treatment applied. Operators of fur farms shall notify the competent authority in advance when animals are to be slaughtered, to enable the Official Veterinarian to check that the requirements set out in this Regulation, and the standard operating procedures, are being observed.

The Official Veterinarian shall regularly verify the monitoring procedures and adherence to the standard operating procedures.

Animal welfare officer: responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules should lie with the operator, and should not in any circumstances lie with a particular employee.

Depopulation: the report deletes the requirement for an action plan before the commencement of an operation. It adds that in cases of force majeure, the competent authority may grant derogations from one or more of the provisions of the Regulation where it considers that compliance is likely to affect human health or significantly slow down the process of eradication of a disease or further undermine animal welfare.

Reference centres: this article is deleted. The committee also made certain amendments to the article on the **certificate of competence**.

Transitional provisions: the committee wants certificates of competence to be issued without examination to persons demonstrating appropriate training and relevant professional experience of at least 12 months before the entry into force of the Regulation. The Commission had specified 10 years of professional experience.

The report adds that the Commission shall by 1 January 2013 submit a legislative proposal on the establishment of conditions and rules on the use of mobile slaughterhouses within the Union, ensuring that all precautions are taken in those mobile units not to compromise animal welfare.

Annexes: the committee made certain amendments to the annexes on the methods of stunning and killing and operational rules for slaughterhouses.