

Brussels, 23 June 2009

Ministers disappoint on new slaughter legislation

European Ministers of Agriculture yesterday agreed a new EU law which should improve the welfare of animals before being sent to slaughter. Although the new provisions aim to avoid unnecessary suffering and adapt legislation to new technologies and scientific findings, many animals will continue to be killed under unacceptable conditions.

Member states have merely approved minor changes and have avoided addressing the most serious welfare problems that occur at slaughter such as the killing of animals which are still conscious under the guise of religious customs, and live shackling, a very controversial way of killing meat chickens. On the positive side, slaughterhouses will have to appoint an animal welfare officer and operators will need to be trained and hold a certificate of competence before they will be allowed to handle the animals.

Eurogroup for Animals is appalled to see that so little has been done to improve the welfare of the billions of animals which are slaughtered in the EU every year. *"Maintaining the status quo for the treatment of billions of chickens is a disgrace"*, says Sonja Van Tichelen, Director of Eurogroup.

The EU's very own scientific report has condemned the ongoing practice of live shackling, the method of hanging the birds upside down, hereby subjecting them to excruciating pain, and electrocuting them by means of a water bath conductor before proceeding to kill them. A recent scientific report on Dutch slaughterhouses also concluded that "a large number of birds were inadequately stunned".

This means that animals are still conscious at the time of killing. The report goes on to recommend that the system of conventional water bath stunning should be "strongly discouraged". Ministers are also, alarmingly, willing to wait until 2013 before the publication of a new scientific report on live shackling. There is no need for this delay as most of the information needed to complete such a study is already available. It is simply unacceptable.

In many new slaughterhouses, alternative methods such as gas stunning are currently being applied which offer several advantages: they provide better welfare protection, better meat quality and also offer better guarantees of worker's safety.

Eurogroup for Animals regrets that the new Regulation, which will not have to be applied until 2013, allows EU member states to individually introduce stricter rules for religious slaughter instead of introducing EU-wide rules that apply to all.

"Scientists are clear about the suffering that is a direct consequence of animals not being stunned or properly stunned. We can even count on the support of some religious communities who also would like to see an end to killing without stunning. We now call on EU member states to follow Sweden's example and ban this practice at national level".

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Notes:

- Four billion chickens and 360 million other animals are slaughtered in the EU every year.
- Shackling is an extremely painful method of restricting the movement of poultry, in which birds are hanged upside down by their legs and remain in this painful position before they are brought to an electrified bath for stunning. With this system there is no guarantee that the animals are fully unconscious when slaughtered.
- There is clear evidence that for big poultry slaughterhouses, alternative stunning methods such as gas stunning (also known as Controlled Atmosphere Stunning (CAS)) are already economically viable methods of stunning.
- EU scientific report that condemns live shackling: The EFSA Journal (2004), 45, 1-29, Welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals ([link](#))
- The Dutch scientific report is that of V.A. Hindle, E. Lambooi, H.G.M. Reimert, L.D. Workel, M.A. Gerritzen on "Electrical water bath stunning of poultry. An evaluation of the present situation in Dutch slaughterhouses and alternative electrical stunning methods" (May 2009) ([link](#))