

Protection of animals at the time of killing

2008/0180(CNS) - 18/09/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to improve the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter or killing, to encourage innovation in relation to stunning and killing techniques and to provide a level playing field within the internal market for the operators concerned.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

BACKGROUND: every year nearly 360 million pigs, sheep, goats and cattle as well as more than four billion poultry are killed in EU slaughterhouses. In addition, the European fur industry kills 25 million animals, while hatcheries kill 330 million day-old-chicks. The control of contagious diseases may also require the killing of millions of animals. The protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing, has been covered by Community legislation since 1974, and was substantively reinforced by Directive 93/119 /EC. However, large discrepancies have been observed between the Member States in implementing that Directive and major welfare concerns and differences susceptible to affect competitiveness between operators have been pointed out.

The present situation is therefore not satisfactory in relation to the objectives pursued. The level of animal protection is unequally enforced in the Member States, with sometimes very unsatisfactory results. The proposal provides for simplification of legislation in this area. The proposal repealing the current Directive will make national transpositions obsolete. In addition, the better integration into food safety legislation will facilitate implementation.

CONTENT: this proposal will replace Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing, which covers the killing of farmed animals.

In light of this the proposal provides substantial added value compared to the status quo.

Changing the legal basis: by changing the legal instrument from a **directive to a regulation**, the proposal provides for uniform and simultaneous application, avoiding the burden and inequalities due to national transpositions. The form of a regulation is also suitable for faster implementation of changes due to technical and scientific progress. It also provides for a single set of rules making them more visible and easier to apply both for EU operators and trading partners.

Taking ownership of animal welfare: the proposal also contains greater flexibility for operators through the adoption of guidelines on detailed technical matters. At the same time it requires operators to take real ownership of animal welfare. Each operator will have to develop and implement standard operating procedures for ensuring proper welfare standards in a reliable way. Such a methodology is not new for slaughterhouses as it is already required and in place for food safety (the so-called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point or HACCP system). Requiring standardized procedures for animal welfare is an innovation of this proposal. As part of this, the proposal will require operators to evaluate the efficiency of their stunning methods through animal based indicators. After stunning animals will have to be regularly monitored to ensure they do not regain consciousness before slaughter. In addition, each slaughterhouse will have to appoint an Animal Welfare Officer who will be accountable for implementing the animal welfare measures. Small slaughterhouses will benefit from a derogation from this requirement.

Furthermore, the proposal requires manufacturers of stunning equipment to provide instructions for the use of their equipment, on how to monitor their efficiency and keep them in good working order.

Updating standards and more competent personnel: the proposal also aims to develop learning mechanisms based on sound science to make animal welfare better understood and integrated in the daily tasks of animal handlers, slaughter-men and official inspectors. The proposal requires staff handling animals in slaughterhouses to possess a certificate of competence regarding the welfare aspects of their tasks. The certificate will be valid for a maximum of 5 years and submitted to independent examination by accredited bodies. The proposal also aims at creating national centres of reference on animal welfare in order to provide technical support for officials working in slaughterhouses. Although there are some research centres in many Member States, the results of their work and their technical competence is not sufficiently available to official inspectors. The centre will provide scientific assessment for new stunning methods/equipment and newly built slaughterhouses, and will accredit bodies delivering certificates of competence concerning animal welfare. The proposal will provide precise definitions for stunning methods. It will also set up a common system for authorising new methods of stunning.