

Protection of animals at the time of killing

2008/0180(CNS) - 06/05/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 367 votes to 97 against with 45 abstentions a legislative resolution amending, under the consultation procedure, the proposal for a Council regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing. The amendments adopted are chiefly intended to clarify the rules, to prevent red tape and to ensure that imports comply with EU standards.

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: Parliament 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.

General requirements for killing: Parliament deleted operators obligations to ensure that animals are prevented from adverse interaction. It adds that the killing of surplus one-day chicks, by whatever means, shall no longer be permitted once appropriate alternatives to the killing of these animals are available.

Stunning: Members stipulate that bleeding shall start as soon as possible after stunning. In addition, they state that in order to take account of scientific and technical progress, the Commission may approve new stunning methods on the basis of an assessment by the European Food Safety Authority

Standard operating procedures: these will not apply to shall not apply to the killing of animals at slaughterhouses where not more than 50 livestock units per week are slaughtered.

Furthermore, 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 (Regulation (EC) No 852/2004).

The resolution 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: Parliament states 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: the competent authority, referred to in Regulation (EC) No 853/2004, shall approve for each slaughterhouse with a slaughter capacity of more than 50 livestock units per week or more than 150 000 units of poultry per annum. Members deleted the requirement that the competent authority must approve the maximum throughput for each slaughter line.

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 considered 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. Slaughterhouses slaughtering fewer than 1 000 livestock units of mammals or 150 000 units of poultry per year may be operated by an animal welfare officer, and the procedure for obtaining a certificate of competence will be simplified in accordance with specifications defined by the competent authority.

Depopulation: Parliament deletes the requirement for an action plan before the commencement of an operation, and deletes the requirement for an evaluation report. 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. Parliament also made certain amendments to the article on the certificate of competence with regard to training. It adds that certificates of competence shall be valid for an unlimited period (rather than 5 years.)

Transitional provisions: Parliament 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 resolution 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: Parliament made certain amendments to the annexes on the methods of stunning and killing and operational rules for slaughterhouses. It stipulates in particular that Carbon dioxide at concentrations over

30 % shall not be used to stun or slaughter poultry in a slaughterhouse. Such concentrations may only be used to kill surplus chicks or for the purposes of disease control.