



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES FOR 11th February 2014 HUMANE SLAUGHTER

Political Members: Neil Parish MP, Lord Trees, Baroness Hodgson

Associate Members: Marc Abraham (PupAid), Serena Cowdy (Journalist), Angela Wright (CIWF), Fiona Wright, Denisa Delic (Kennel Club), Sally Phillips (RSPCA), Sharon Ife, J.M Blackwell (BVA), Keith Meldrum (World Horse Welfare), Kim Fielding, John Thorley (AIMS), David Bowles (RSPCA), Helena Cotton (BVA), Sally Burnell (BVA), Jay Beecher, Ben Myring (RCVS), Louise Moyle (POST), Dimple Patel (Animal Welfare Party), Laura Macanea (Animal Welfare Party), Lord McNair (ECMA), N.J Bagley (AIMS), Robin Hargreaves (BVA), Russell Fielding (Slaughterman),

Robin Hargreaves: President British Veterinary Association

Welfare at slaughter is high on list of what our BVA members care about as revealed during a recent survey. Our position on slaughter was developed using members who work in abattoirs and in veterinary health associations. This is not a new position for the BVA to take in that we believe that slaughter can be humane if the animal is protected from pain and suffering, but for that to happen the animal must be stunned rendering it insensible to pain.

EU Legislation requires stunning before slaughter and this is the default position. All animals including fish should be stunned before slaughter as immediacy protects animal welfare. The scientific consensus behind this is that slaughter without pre stunning compromises animal welfare. The FAWC report stated "we are persuaded that a massive injury such as a cut results in pain." The issue arises from times of death to the delay until loss of consciousness which can be a considerable length of time. Although stunning methods involve risks to animal welfare, stunning prior to neck cutting is proven to be the lowest risk. The BVA position is on animal welfare grounds not religious freedom but the only reason non-stun is allowed is for religious freedom. We have never had a mailbag like it from members of the public supporting our position since we started to work on this issue. There have been 19,800 signatures in a week on our Government petition. We want dialogue with all those involved and we are willing to discuss other options such as immediate post cut stunning, clear labeling and minimising the number of animals used in non-stun slaughter.

Kenneth Clarke: Veterinary Consultant (formerly oversaw Public Health and Food Safety)

Marisa Heath, Secretariat

Tel: 07736 899 547 E-mail: admin@apgaw.org Website: www.apgaw.org

I have worked much of my professional life with hygiene and food safety and spent time in over twenty years visiting slaughterhouses both in the UK and other countries. I am the past president of the Veterinary Public Health Association with many members who have worked as vets in abattoirs with duties of monitoring animal welfare legislation. I support Robin Hargreaves statement but additionally there are concerns over the position on the declaration that vets make when they join the RCVS which is that “my constant endeavour will be to ensure the welfare of animals committed to my care.” The concern is as to how this squares up with the view that animals shall be spared pain and distress in their killing when non-stun fails to do this. Many organisations have come out strongly opposed to slaughter without stunning and FAWC has said it is unacceptable under any circumstance. My view based on personal experience and on discussing this with colleagues working in slaughterhouses and from my understanding of published literature, is that simply slaughter without stunning severely compromises animal welfare and all animals should be stunned before slaughter.

Russell Fielding: Retired Slaughterman

I have 40 years of experience in the meat trade and I have done everything in an abattoir including working on the slaughter line. I have worked in halal and kosher abattoirs. I appreciate the sensitivity of the issue because I have seen it from the kill floor. Vets and officials have a respect when they step in but they come and leave. The constant on the kill floor is my experience and categorically with no hesitation, I would state that if the issue is humane slaughter, the animal has to be stunned. The scientific facts and the tests have been done which say one thing but I have done it everyday and I see it up close so I can confirm it. There is no humanity in just cutting something's throat. You cannot say humane and cut a throat without pre-stun. Any animal not restrained will walk around if it is not restrained. That is common. There is post stun after cut but that is like shutting the gate when the horse has bolted. If you are going to be practical and humane, it has to be pre-stunned.

However, 85% of halal is pre-stunned, all New Zealand lamb is halal but pre-stunned. Scheita is another matter, there is more finesse involved in how that is done but ultimately it is still inhumane. Only 50% of beef done with the Scheita method is for the Jewish population as they only eat the forequarters and not the hindquarters. The other 50% of that meat is coming into the main market. I do not believe labeling is the answer to this as things can be moved around so it has to be done based on the animal, the raw material. If the objective of this meeting is animal welfare then something has to be done to improve this. All religions state on their list of requirements that animal welfare is important so surely you are betraying one ritual by observing the other. All animals bleed to death, and my experience, particularly with beef animals which have a different supply of blood especially calves, is that they will survive the cut for minutes afterwards. That has to stop in my opinion.

The whole process can be made as humane as possible with the handling of the animals but right at the end it means nothing if you cut its throat fully conscious.

Rizvan Khalid: Euro Quality Lambs Ltd (Halal)

My family has been in the meat business involving a lamb slaughterhouse since the 1970s. I have worked since 16 at the abattoir. My professional background is as a chartered accountant. When I came back into the family business as a young professional accountant I thought I would learn the meat and slaughter industry very quickly but it is very complex. I realized I needed to know from a religious and scientific perspective the issues around slaughter and meat quality which led to me studying a Masters in Meat Science & Technology and ensuring I really understood the issue.

For halal the stunning method must not kill the animal, nor affect the blood loss nor hurt the animal. There are various ways of stunning and each method is not the same from either a halal or welfare perspective. Electric head-only stunning (EHOS) is one method. EHOS does not kill sheep nor compromise its compatibility for halal meat. More research is required for EHOS on cattle. What is crucial for halal consumers is that we have to be able to demonstrate that the animal has not died at the stun. This is where UK legislation does not help since, unlike in New Zealand, it is illegal to demonstrate recovery to provide assurance to customers of its halal status.

On the other hand slaughter without stunning is routinely discussed as if the risks are the same for all species. Cattle have a different anatomy to sheep and poultry that means they are conscious for longer following the cut so there is a higher inherent welfare risk. Taking sheep as an example it takes 7 seconds on average for loss of consciousness and it must be recognized that death is a process and is not instantaneous. Animals are first slaughtered, then they lose consciousness, then they are dead and then post-death convulsions start. Many people mistake post-death convulsions, i.e. kicking of limbs on the bleed-line, as cruelty with the animal painfully dying but it is actually natural pain-free convulsions as the muscle turns to meat. The animal is not conscious at that point. People always focus on this post-death kicking but the welfare question is how much pain is being felt during slaughter without stunning, in intensity & duration, from slaughter to unconsciousness. This pain needs to be benchmarked against other routine husbandry procedures such as ear-tagging, castration & tail-docking so we are honest as a society about the welfare insults applied to animals bred for meat.

When we give choice over meat that is eaten we compromise the welfare of every animal throughout its life but if the stun method compromises halal or kosher criteria then the *raison d'être* for the animal to be bred for meat no longer exists. I am responsible to those who I give my meat to and I need to be able to tell them where the meat has come from. The personal requirement should not be denied. We do not say that non-stun slaughter should be performed without restrictions because we are supporters of best-practice slaughter in all systems, stun or non-stun. In relation to customer requirements we are pro choice.

We believe that it has to be the best practice possible so for example the animals need to be restrained properly. There is a practice used for Halal slaughter of large animals such as camels and cattle called Nahr, or a chest cut, which would cut down significantly the time to unconsciousness for cattle. Welfare organizations recognize this advantage as the arteries are cut before it branches off into a vertebral artery. This would be best practice and should be explored. Currently as far as I'm aware it is not used in the UK. There is also an opportunity for kosher hindquarters to be diverted into the halal food chain and there needs to be some work on this which would ensure

non-stun products are going to those customers that are actively looking for it. At the same time there is choice today for consumers who want pre-stunned product, for example supermarket endorsed food assurance schemes include Freedom food, Red Tractor and Soil Association. It is important that there is also choice for other consumers who require non stunned.

Leon Pein: Biblical Foods Ltd (Kosher)

I am not a scientist nor do I speak for the Jewish community. The most respected leader was Moses and without his guidance the Jewish leadership would not exist. His ten commandments remain the bedrock of western religious beliefs. I mention this because he was chosen by God because of his kindness of animals. Jewish children have been told the most central figure in 6000 years of Jewish history was chosen because he cared for animals and yet I hear that Scheita is cruel and barbaric so this is strange.

I approve strongly of organisations like CIWF, FAWC, RSPCA Green Peace, PETA and I am a member of them. I started what I do which is to supply the UK's only certified organic and kosher meat in UK because I was appalled by what happened on factory farms. I did this with an environment and ethical angle. The first time I got the process organised I knew I would come face to face with real slaughter which scared me seeing animals die up close. I had read lots of articles and thought if it was cruel I would not be able to go ahead. I went to the abattoir with trepidation but the process with chickens being slaughtered was quick and painless.

I scrutinise the whole process within my company and so I have seen tens of thousands of chickens, hundreds of lamb and a couple of cattle slaughtered. The worst reaction I have ever seen was a few chickens whose legs flashed around. There was no reaction from the lambs and cows. I do not know what the researchers who write critical reports have seen because that is not my experience.

It is better than conventional slaughter and as a report by CIWF stated, "sadly largely because animals are hussled through abattoirs at such great speed it is hard to safeguard their welfare." With the Kosher method there are 600 chickens per hour which is twenty times slower than conventional slaughterhouses so it is clear who is taking more care of the animals. The process is that there is a crate of animals, each chicken is taken out by their wings, taken to the Kosher slaughterer who looks at the neck for no obstructions, the knife goes across the throat and then he checks it is done correctly before the chicken is taken away for the blood to drain out. Rapid loss of consciousness of the animal occurs.

Ritual slaughter uses a specially trained religious person called shochet, and he uses a special knife to do cut a single cut without tearing or ripping the animal. The animal is checked regularly. It is not a production line which just keeps going. This religious slaughterer works for the Jewish community, he does not work for the abattoir. He is trained in animal anatomy, he does not care about speed of the production line. His responsibility is to the animal and that means better welfare.

Question Session

Dr Angela Wright (CIWF) – I support the BVA’s position and I really cannot see that unnecessary suffering is prevented if the animals are not pre stunned. We have a particular concern relating to bovines with longer time to loss of consciousness. We support transparency and would like to see labeling. Robin summed up what made slaughter humane – that the process should not be aversive, Moves towards gas stunning with carbon monoxide is an aversive experience for the animal concerned. I was interested to hear what Rizvan said about the possibility of the meat from Kosher slaughter going into the halal food chain. How would that work given there is supposed to be prayer said as the animal is cut.

Leon Pein – Just to explain when an animal is killed for Kosher, the hindquarters are not used because it is difficult to take out the veins banned in Jewish law from consumption.

Rizvan Khalid–. The prayer is important for both Muslims and Jews but whereas Muslims require the prayer to be said on each animal the Shochet (Jewish slaughterman) says it once before entering the slaughtering area. As a reminder the prayer is simply mentioning ‘In the name of God’ and ideally ‘In the name of God. God is Great’. We believe in the same prophets as the Jews so if the Shochet were to say ‘In the name of the Lord of Moses’ for example, or ‘In the name of the Lord of Abraham’, over each animal it would refer to the same God and would be Islamically acceptable. We would still need to be transparent for Muslim customers and it would be an education campaign.

Serena Cowdry – Should customers always be allowed to get the choice they want. There has to be checks and balances. Taking religious specificity out of it, would there be validity in saying you cannot have whatever you want? Surely the minimum times an animal feels pain is where we are trying to get. So if the majority of Halal can be pre-stunned why can all of it not be pre-stunned?

Rizvan Khalid – The whole reason farm animals are reared is so they can be eaten by humans. That is a choice that we as society have made. People should be allowed to consume what they want. Do you want to deny people their ability to consume meat? Similar to how Organic consumers consider the commodity meat production system ‘wrong’ there are Muslims who consider the only true way of slaughtering animals is how the prophets slaughtered the animals. There are people who believe in the prophets and believe they were sent down as a mercy from God to guide human beings to a better way of life. Abraham, Moses, David, Solemon etc. Their slaughter methods cannot be inhumane. We must constantly improve the way we do it. It’s important to remember that welfare is compromised throughout the life of the animal well before the slaughter so it is how we manage it that is important.

Neil Parish MP – We are not going into a huge debate on what has happen to animals before they get to slaughter, we are looking at the slaughter process and how to make that as humane as possible.

Robin Hargreaves – Welfare is constantly evolving as Rizvan said but the one thing that has not evolved is this slaughter method. There are many things we did hundred of years ago that are not

acceptable now. Why is this unique to evolution? There is a convincing description on how to do the job properly which I accept but there is a presumption that it will be done well. However, this does not resolve the issue that doing it causes proven welfare problems. We accept it varies from species to species but if any animal is conscious after throat cut it is simply better that it should not be.

Neil Parish MP –If you go back 3000 years many animals were bludgeoned to death and that system of slaughter was one that was thought to be correct in its day. I am not convinced that with the same equipment we have today that both of those religions would have come up with the same method. They would have amended it accordingly. There are systems of halal slaughter throughout the world that do allow some stunning providing the animal is recoverable which demonstrates it can be done.

Rizvan Khalid - Everyone is talking about welfare but foremost this is food that has to be fit to eat. We are talking about animals we are going to eat. Food permissibility, including food safety, comes before welfare. How can it be said that welfare during slaughter without stunning has not evolved. Have restraint systems not improved? Has knife sharpness not improved? Has operator skill and knowledge not improved?

Lord Trees – I have looked at this issue in detail and my understanding of the Muslim requirement is that the animal should be alive at time of death, That can be achieved by non lethal head stunning. The Jewish position is that the animal should not be blemished or harmed and Kosher meat can be rejected by the Rabbi on the basis of visual inspection of the carcass. There are electric head stunning techniques for cattle and I would suggest that it would be impossible for visual inspection to determine that the animal had been harmed or blemished by that process. Is that not a way to satisfy the religious requirements as well as the welfare aspirations?

Rizvan Khalid –Muslims are not homogenous consumers. Some of our customers want meat slaughtered as the prophets would have slaughtered it.

Leon Pein –Any form of pre-slaughter electrocuted stunning would be unacceptable as the animal must be conscious at the time of slaughter. As the slaughterman said, both pre-stunned, and un-stunned, animals bleed to death - the point is that, with shechita, they do so painlessly. Conventional chicken slaughter involves suspending birds upside down, in a totally unnatural position, that they have never encountered, potentially causing stress. They are held by their feet, or ankles, so that a combined c. 1-2 inches diameter of leg or ankles, is holding c.2.4kg of body weight, which (potentially) causes excruciating pain. According to the stunning equipment manufacturers' instructions of electric waterbaths (chickens') heads are to be immersed for 4 seconds, up to their wings. This sounds like it is attempted drowning, or would precipitate choking.

Robin Hargreaves – Yet the evidence shows that 40% of animals killed by Scheita stood up again which is not possible if they are unconscious.

Neil Parish MP–Some animals take a very long time to die from the cut. A lot of work has been done to try to and test the suffering of animals under the various systems. Bovines take the longest time to die.

Russell Fielding – The notion of instantaneous unconsciousness does not happen. It is horrendous, and the notion of instant death is untrue. Whilst I have not cut their throats whilst conscious I have held the animals and it is not a quick death.

Rizvan Khalid – Not all stun methods are compatible with halal and non stun meat produces a higher standard of halal religiously.

Russell Fielding– So it is possible to have ordinary halal which has been pre stunned and then there is a premium halal which has not been stunned? That is a just a marketing tool.

David Bowles (RSPCA) – For clarification, is it still halal if you go with a certain stunning method because many people buying halal may think it is not halal. Schimon Cohen from Scheita UK believes that the cut is stunning in itself but the studies have contradicted this. One of the ways forward would be to have an agreement on the science around this issue as people are getting really confused.

Rizvan Khalid - Religious acceptability is crucial to the consumer but I agree it would help to have clarification around the science. The existing science base is frankly not good enough.

Serena Cowdry – If you are producing meat for the customer it has to be acceptable which I understand but it seems there is a sensible line to be drawn where 90% of people get what they want but the other 10% do not because humanity has to come into play. There has to be a line drawn. What lengths would you go to for the premium halal? If the majority of customer are happy with stunned halal why not stick to that?

Rizvan Khalid –What is the necessary criteria for some people to be able to consume that meat? Surely it should be the consumer choice. We need to go back to the scientific base to look at ways of doing slaughter better rather than preventing certain methods. Without non-stun slaughter some people would be forced to become vegetarian.

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Muslim Council of Britain – Stunning means that the humane element is taken for granted, yet there are different methods of stunning and different species. Nobody has talked about these differences and how are they quantified in terms of animal welfare which needs to be recognised.

Duncan McNair (ECMA)– What would be the situation if there was no derogation? If legislation passed eliminating derogation then what would your select group who want the premium non-stun halal do?

Rizvan Khalid – They would import it.

Keith Meldrum (World Horse Welfare) – Aside from the stunning issue, there are problems in every slaughterhouse and we need CCTV in all of them to look at the issues to remove any problems that exist.

Neil Parish MP – I agree on the CCTV point. To conclude this meeting, I will be continuing to take evidence on humane slaughter through the APPG Beef and Lamb and the discussion this evening will feed into that. Marisa will draw up a record of the points to be sent to the Minister, George Eustice MP. I believe this is a subject which will continue to be high profile and the petition set up by the BVA has already had a large number of signatures which I would encourage. This is a very important issue. APGAW supports high welfare for animals and so our position remains that we have serious concerns over non-stun slaughter and will be pressing the Government to look into this matter.

END